

The Resurgence:

Chronicles of the Shadow Chaser

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The following are sample chapters for my upcoming novel, "The Resurgence: Chronicles of the Shadow Chaser." Dedicated to members of

the Facebook group, “The Shadow Chaser: Enter the Shadow Crypt.”
Thank you all for your patience and support.

Randy Belaire

“The man who gives voice to injustice will never go unnoticed, nor shall avenging justice pass him by.”

The book of Wisdom

Chapter 1

Chicago, Illinois. USA. October 30, 1986:

“**Y**ou have 10 hours to bring me 5 million dollars, or your little boy is dead,” the voice on the phone said. Tomas Collins hung up while the police looked on.

Collins asked, “Did you get it?” He tried to swallow, but his throat was dryer than the desert.

“No, we just missed it,” the policeman said. “But we’ll be here when they call back.”

“It’s Stavros,” Collins shouted. “He wants my company, and I won’t give it to him. So, he has kidnapped my son—and he’s going to kill him!”

“Tom, please. The FBI has had great success with kidnapping cases,” the man in a navy blue three-piece suit said.

“He’s right, Mr. Collins, we are the best at what we do,” the agent replied.

“Could you please explain your connection with Antonio Stavros?”

“A few months ago, Stavros came to my office and wanted to buy 49 per cent of my equity in the business. He offered me 50 million dollars. I felt that I had to turn him down because of his reputation and connections with organized crime. His face is all over the news.”

“Did he threaten you or your family at that time?”

“No, not at first, but weeks later, I received some strange phone calls, and experienced some odd encounters on the street. Last week, I was almost driven off the road.”

“Could you tell us more about your business?”

“Collins Hope is a financial aid institution,” Collins replied. “We help low-income families with loans to help them with mortgages and other bills.”

“I can see why Stavros would want to put his claws in a business like yours. He could control the loans and make a profit as well as having a front to move into the East Side of Chicago,” the agent said.

“But he didn’t actually threaten you, Tom. You can’t just say that he is responsible for Patrick’s kidnapping,” his friend said.

“Earl, you know what he’s capable of doing. Stavros is a powerful man. Agent Flynn, can you absolutely guarantee my son’s safety? Can you look me in the eye and guarantee you will bring my son home?” Before Agent

Flynn could reply, a frantic woman entered the room. Tears streamed down her cheeks and fear consumed every inch of her body.

She collapsed in his arms and asked, "Tom, is it true that they have him?"

Collins cradled his fragile wife. "Diana, we'll get him back."

The phone rang.

The police took their positions and awaited for Flynn's instructions.

"Let's get it right this time, people," Flynn said, and nodded at Collins to answer it.

"Hello."

"I want you to put the money in a Swiss account. The account number is 674239-12. There's been a change of plans," the rugged voice said. "We want half of the money in half the time, or the little brat is dead."

"I will do whatever you want," Collins said, "but please let me talk to my son." Silence and a sense of dread enveloped the room; then he heard the voice of a frightened five-year-old boy.

"Mommy, Daddy! I want to go home." The voice of their little boy quivered. Collins felt the icy touch of fear within his son. A frustrated Collins tried in vain to reassure his child with the warmth of his voice.

"Daddy is here, son. Everything is going to be okay." However, before the child could reply, the kidnapper took the phone away.

"Well, wasn't that touching, but you better have the money in five hours, or the next time you want to talk to your boy it will be through Jesus."

"You will have your money I promise." The dial tone ended the call.

"Patrick," his wife yelled at the top of her lungs.

"Everything will be all right, Diana. We'll pay them what they want, and then we'll get Patrick back home." Collins clutched onto his wife with all the affection he could offer in this time of horror.

"Did we get it this time?" Flynn asked.

"Stand by, sir," the agent replied, checking his equipment.

Uncertain of the child's future, Flynn said, "Alright, men, we'll monitor this house and the phone lines in case they call back."

"Sir, we have them," the agent proclaimed.

"Where are they?"

"According to the scanner, they are about three miles south by the old abandoned theatre on Racine Street."

"Let's get going. We'll notify you when we get there, Mr. Collins," Flynn said, but before he could leave, Collins grabbed his left arm.

"Again, Agent Flynn, I ask you. Can you promise me that you will bring back our son to us?" Tears ran down his face.

Flynn replied, "Nobody can make that promise, sir." Flynn turned towards the door and left to deal with the unexpected.

Unknown to both, the Collins's and the FBI, someone else was eavesdropping on the various conversations within the house and the telephone calls from the abductors. Approximately 30 yards away from the Collins family home, a parked van with Ontario plates appeared abandoned. But inside sat a man surrounded by equipment that he installed for electronic surveillance. Arthur Brown knew what Tomas and Diana Collins were feeling—having himself suffered from the pain of losing a loved one. Ten years ago, a serial rapist and his gang had killed his wife, Claire. The system failed him and freed the perpetrators.

We, the jury, find the defendants not guilty by reason of insanity.

The words of the jury foremen haunted his life to this day. At that moment, Brown swore that the guilty would be held responsible for hurting the innocent. He spent the next five years training both his physical frame and mental psyche to prepare himself for the war in which he was about to enlist—the war on injustice. Brown, a man in his mid-thirties, but already one of the most prolific inventors of his generation, he used his knowledge to a tremendous advantage. A genius, 30 years ahead of his time, he had created numerous weapons and a combat suit that he used against the scum of society. The black suit consists of high-tech fabric overall garment that covered his entire body, a long cloak, and a black fedora, which he used as an advanced type of boomerang. He even installed red lights in his cowl to make it appear that he had red eyes, an illusion to fool the enemy. Also, he equipped the cowl with an equalizer to mask his true voice and create the impression that the enemy would be fighting a spectre instead of a man. Brown pursued criminals that the law had determined to be 'Untouchable' either because of a lack of evidence or because of loopholes in the justice system. While fighting his war against evil, an expensive proposition, his resources dwindled. Allocating more time to the war at the detriment to his professional endeavours began to take a toll on his finances. But for now, the boy's life became his main priority. Brown traced the call with one of his newest inventions.

According to this, the party is being held at the harbour docks about four miles north of here. Stavros's men have the FBI believing that they are further down south. It appears that they have prepared for every contingency. Except for me. Brown thought while he stared at the computer screen.

"Stavros is up to his old tricks again. Well, it looks like it is time to balance the scales of justice for him and his associates." Brown closed his surveillance equipment.

The phone rang.

Brown grabbed the receiver of his car phone.

"Doctor Arthur Brown here."

“Art, it’s Alex. I heard that you were coming to Chicago on a business trip,” the voice said.

“Alex, it is good to hear from you. Listen, you have caught me at a bad time. I am in a meeting. May I call you back?”

“Sure, Art. I just wanted to let you know that we have a suite at the same hotel where you are staying, and I was wondering if we could get together tonight. Virginia wants to see you.”

“Sounds great, Alex. I am in room 205. My meeting will not take long. I’ll call you when I get a chance.”

Taylor replied, “Excellent. I’ll see you then.” And Brown hung up. The business community considered Brown’s best friend, Alexander Taylor, one of the up-and-coming stars in the business world. He had equity stakes in a number of companies most notably oil, mining, computers, and now he started to venture into the new biotechnology frontier. Taylor lived the life Brown could only dream of having. Rich as a small country, and married to a beautiful woman; indeed fortune smiled on Taylor. Even though he had earned his fortune the honest way, Brown felt a little envious of his friend’s perfect life. However, Brown had no time to sink into self-pity.

“I only have four hours to save this child—or he’s dead.” Brown started to put on his combat suit.

“Arthur Brown has done all he can for the Collins family. Now, it’s time for justice to come in and do its job.” Brown pulled the mask over his face and activated the voice equalizer.

“Now, enter the Shadow Chaser,” he said as he headed for battle.

Chapter 2

A stoic Antonio Stavros sat in his office and waited to hear from his bookkeeper. Cocky and arrogant, Stavros knew the authorities would not locate him in this old, abandoned warehouse located by the harbour close to Lake Michigan. The police considered Stavros the reigning king of the underworld. With the voice of a stern businessman, the looks of a Latino lover, and the temper of a pit bull, Stavros fought his way to the top in order to achieve this power. His recent activities included the murder of his mentor and boss, Big Daddy Marino. Upon his death, Stavros took over the Scorpio Syndicate. That alone demonstrated his true ambitions and brought fear among the other families. Stavros always got what he wanted, so when Tomas Collins took a stand against him—he had to pay. The price for his opposition would be the death of his son Patrick. Even if Collins delivered the ransom on time, the boy had to die. Stavros grabbed his phone and dialed one of his associates.

“Hello, Juan. Has our transaction been completed yet?”

“No, sir. However, our client has three hours left to complete the first half of his financial obligations. We will notify you the moment the transaction is complete, sir.”

“Excellent. Until then, Juan.” And he ended the call. Stavros always used business terms to carry out orders, just in case someone bugged his phone. In doing so, Stavros prevented the police from using any wiretap evidence against him. A man that looked like he belonged to the Capone gang entered his office.

“Mr. Stavros, the area is secured. I got Louis and Victor checking the port. We are ready to take out the little tyke when you want, sir.”

“Get Clyde here. When the time comes, I will give him the order to waste the bambino,” Stavros said. The goon complied with his order. Minutes later, another goon walked in the room.

“You sent for me, sir?”

“Clyde, has the kid finished his meal yet?” Stavros asked.

“Yes, he is, Mr. Stavros,” Clyde replied. “He’s a good kid. He beat me in checkers.”

“That doesn’t surprise me, Clyde,” Stavros said with an annoyed look on his face. “Once I get the call that the money is in my account—kill him.”

“Kill him, sir?”

“Yes, kill him. What? Is there a damn echo in here?”

“No, sir. But he’s just a kid.” Clyde felt sympathy for the child. “We are going to get what we want. Why does the kid have to die, too?”

“You don’t want to kill the kid?”

“No, sir. I don’t.”

“I understand, Clyde. I’ll tell you what. You just go back there and get the kid ready, and we’ll let him go—after we get the money of course.” Stavros smiled.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Now run along, Clyde,” Stavros said. Clyde got up to leave his office, but Stavros had something else in mind. Stavros pulled the trigger and again. The bullets pierced Clyde’s spine. The thug’s body thumped to the concrete floor.

Stavros said, “Never question my orders again, Clyde.” And he walked towards the body and fired more shots into his former lackey. Three of his men ran towards the office.

“What’s wrong, boss?” one of them asked as they spotted Clyde’s dead body drowning in his own blood.

Stavros replied, “Oh, Clyde just gave me his resignation. Bobby, take him out of my sight. The rest of you, stay alert,” Bobby remained with Stavros while the others continued with their duties.

“Where do you want me to put him, boss?”

“Put him with the boy. Let the little brat see what awaits him.” Stavros smiled.

“Yes, boss,” Bobby said before he dragged Clyde’s body out of the office.

About three hours had passed, and still there was no answer—until now.

Brrrinnng!

“Hello,” Stavros greeted. “Yes, Juan. Excellent, we’ll meet shortly.” Stavros hung the receiver in its place to end the conversation.

“Was that Juan, boss?”

“Yes, it was. Bobby, you know what to do.”

“Quick and easy or slow and painful?”

“Oh, slow and painful, please,” Stavros said. “Once you are done, come back here. I want us all to leave together.” Bobby acknowledged his boss with a quick psychotic grin and left the office. He walked to the other side of the musty, old warehouse before he arrived at the room. He opened the door and noticed the little boy beside Clyde’s dead body.

Crying, the boy asked, “Can I go home now?”

Bobby took out his blades and grinned. “Yeah, kid, it’s all over.”

A voice came from the shadows. **“You are right, scum. It is over for your kind. The ghost of justice is here to cleanse this dark room.”**

A pair of red eyes stared at him in the darkness. “Who are you?” he shouted. “D--d--don’t come any closer, or I’ll gut ya.” But the eyes moved closer.

“Your reign of terror is over, scum,” the cold voice of death exclaimed.

“Stay away from me!” Bobby felt his heart racing, and his fear started to smother him.

“Are you going to talk or fight, scum?” The voice became even more frightening. Bobby tried to slash the shadowed stranger, but failed.

“My turn now!” The stranger grabbed the goon’s left arm and broke it. His arm snapped like a twig and in three different places.

“My arm,” he screamed in pain, but the stranger continued the attack.

Stavros was about to leave when he noticed that Bobby failed to report with his men.

“I know that psycho loves his work, but it has been over twenty minutes. Louis, go see what’s taking him so long.”

“Yes, boss.” Louis headed for the room where they confined the boy. Along the way, he caught a whiff of the damp air around him, and it irritated his nostrils. When he arrived at the door, Louis opened it and expected to smell fresh blood. But when he stepped inside, he could not detect any odour of death.

“Hey, Bobby,” he said. “Where the hell are you?” With the exception of Clyde’s dead body, Louis found himself alone in the deserted room.

“Over here,” the voice shouted at him, and Bobby’s body flew right on top of him. Louis groaned as the body connected with his chest. A few seconds later, Louis rose from the ground and checked his partner out.

He glanced at the mangled condition of his associate’s body and asked, “Bobby, are you all right?”

“His conscience was getting to him. Now, it is your turn,” the stranger said.

Louis shouted, “Oh God, it’s the Devil.” And he spotted the red eyes appear out of nowhere.

“Time’s up.” The stranger gave him a roundhouse kick before he could grab his handgun. The boot connected with a bone-jarring smack to the goon’s face, and the thug fell like a stone onto the floor.

He shouted, “I’m getting the hell out of here.” And he sprung from the floor and ran towards Stavros. Louis screamed in terror. “Boss, Boss. The Devil’s got Bobby.”

“What the hell are you talking about? What devil?” Stavros asked.

The voice said, **“He means me, Stavros.”** The red eyes appeared to the last few of the syndicate.

“How the hell did you find me?” Stavros screamed.

“The stench of evil can be smelled everywhere. And you reek, murderer.”

“That’s no devil. He’s the freak I was telling you about. He’s been after me for months now, but tonight we kill him.”

“Who the hell is he, boss?” Louis asked.

Stavros took out his weapon and replied, “They call him the Shadow Chaser.”

Chapter 3

Stavros and his men had their guns pointing at the Shadow Chaser. The odds were not in his favour, but he did not care.

Stavros ordered. "Take him down, boys," His men began to discharge their guns. Their weapons fired like lighting for about a full minute before they stopped. The last of the shells rained down around them.

"He must be in those crates. Go fish him out, Mario," Stavros said. The thugs headed towards the damaged crates.

"He's not here, boss."

"Bullshit! He was just there," Stavros said when they noticed a cloud of smoke appear to the west of them.

"You can do better than that, scum. I saw that attack coming for days," Shadow Chaser said. The goon squad prepared to fire at him, but Stavros grabbed onto one of his men's shotgun.

"No, you morons. He's right on top of those gasoline barrels. If you miss him, you blow this place to kingdom come."

"You should listen to your boss, scum."

Louis kept his aim on the Shadow Chaser and said, "You can't stay up there forever, you gruesome son of a bitch!"

Shadow Chaser replied, ***"Forever is all I have left. Now, it's time to level the playing field."*** He snapped his fingers, and all the lights in the old warehouse extinguished in an instant.

"How the hell did he do that?" one of the goons demanded.

"I tell you, boss, this guy is the Devil. Who else could do that?" Louis pondered.

"He's not the Devil. He's just some creep in a fancy costume living out some childhood dream. Look sharp and watch where you are firing," Stavros warned his men. "One missed shot, and this place becomes a flare for all of Chicago to see." Stavros and his men skulked around the unlit building.

"Scum can run and hide, but justice will find you and show you no mercy." The voice of the Shadow Chaser surrounded the room. It was not difficult for him to extinguish the lights. Prior to the offensive, he configured a shutdown switch with one of his gadgets while the goons guarded the child. When he snapped his fingers with his left hand, he

activated the miniature remote control with his right hand, creating the appearance that he could turn the lights off and on with just a thought. Miniature speakers installed throughout the room amplified his voice, creating a sense of omniscience throughout the theatre of engagement. Shadow Chaser knew that it would intimidate Stavros's goons, but he knew Stavros wouldn't fall for his illusions. The psychological gamesmanship gave him an advantage against all of those guns aiming for him.

I count five guns—if I don't count Stavros. I see that two of them have split up and are near the back exit. Now, is my time to attack. Shadow Chaser thought and looked through a pair of infrared binoculars. With this fancy gadget, he analyzed the entire room and prepared his strategy. He had the kid hidden in a closet in the same room where he found him. With no one near the room, the child remained safe—for now.

Louis and Mario scouted the back exit. Mildew covered the walls of the old structure that gave off the scent of isolation and abandonment. Both men had their weapons loaded and ready for the kill.

"I hope that he comes here," Mario said. "We'll give him a reason for wearing a mask!" But Louis did not share his friend's enthusiasm.

"I still think it's the Devil, man." Louis strained his eyes as he tried to see in the dark.

"You think everybody is the Devil. Your wife, kids, in-laws, and that little dame you had in the room last night." Mario smirked.

"An intoxicating danger, man." Louis laughed. "Say, why is he after the boss?"

"From what I heard, the boss got away with killing an undercover cop. The boss framed him as a dirty cop working for the Cabera family. The fuzz believe that old man Cabera ordered the hit on the pig, so case closed. Or so the boss thought," Mario whispered. "After that, he got some strange letters and photos about his empire, and he warned the boss about his crimes. It was weird."

"What do you mean weird, Mario?" Louis probed. He started to feel a little uncomfortable with his current situation.

"He was using some quotes from the Bible about justice and vengeance. Stuff about the reckoning."

"The Bible! I told you the guy is the Devil!"

"Will you stop that devil crap!" Mario clapped his hand over Louis's mouth. "Do you want to let all of Chicago know that we are here? Besides, do you want me to tell the rest of it?"

"Okay, man. So, what happened next?" Louis asked, and looked around the dark area.

“Well, about a month ago, the boss had a big shipment of heroin coming in from Afghanistan. It was foolproof, but that's when the chaser guy came into the picture. You know how much the boss likes to have hidden cameras all over the place.”

“Yeah, he calls it a good investment for an untrusting world.”

“Well, the shipment was going good until that freak broke into the boss's office and took all of the dealers out, including our men.”

“All of them dead?”

“None were killed—until the boss got to them of course. But he had knocked them around so much that they wished they were dead. It took that freak about 15 seconds, if that. Then he looked straight into the hidden camera and told the boss that the Shadow Chaser was the one that would destroy him; the freak also said the boss's days were numbered.”

“Then what?”

“Then this Shadow Chaser opened the boss's filing cabinet and took out all of the information he had on that cop, including the evidence that would clear that cop's name. He did this, so that the boss could see everything on tape. Then he called the cops and told them about the drug deal.”

“No wonder the boss wants this guy dead.”

“It gets better. He then left about half of the shipment and a quarter of a million dollars behind for the cops to nail the guys he took down. When the sirens appeared, he ran with the rest of the money, the shipment, and the file.”

“So, he kept it?”

“No, man. When our guys were at court, the DA got a parcel that contained the rest of the shipment, the money, the file, and a videotape,” Mario said.

“But how did he get the tape?”

“It wasn't the boss's tape. He taped the event as it went on.”

“You mean he had the whole bust planned?”

“Yeah, with the file, he cleared the cop's name. With his tape, he sent our boys to jail. But somehow, he contained the rest of the evidence the cops had, just in case the boss had any plans to bribe someone to make it disappear. And believe me the boss tried to get it back. This guy is a real pro.”

“But the boss didn't get charged?”

“The guys said that they acted alone and broke into his office to do the deal. The boss had a good alibi at the time of the crime. As for the file, one of our guys said they were gonna frame the boss by planting the file in his office.”

“But you said that the boss killed them. Didn't you?”

“The boss couldn’t trust them, so he had them put on ice in jail.”

“So, did the boss go after the freak?”

“When he arrived to his home after the trial, the boss got a phone call from the jerk. The voice told him that the Shadow Chaser wouldn’t rest until he stopped the boss. The boss had fake meetings with his lieutenants just in case this Shadow Chaser was gonna bug his discussions. Everybody in the family believed that the boss was going to Florida. In the meantime, he hired some of the best hitters in the country to kill the freak. He mentioned that he would make an arms deal in Orlando. He gave the name of the building, the time, and the day.”

“So, that the man would take the bait, and the hitters would finish him off when he arrived.”

“That was the idea, but it didn’t work out the way the boss had planned it. The freak never showed up. We didn’t hear zip from this guy for months. We thought someone killed the freak, or he got scared and quit. He was no longer chasing the boss. Besides, the boss had a gang war to win, and he didn’t have the time to play cat and mouse with a costumed idiot. So, he just went on with business as usual,” Mario said.

“Until now.”

“Yeah, until now,” Mario replied. The words had just left his mouth when they heard a *crack* about five feet in front of them.

Louis asked, his voice on edge. “What was that?” He shook in his \$300 shoes. The thug remained convinced that this stranger was the prince of darkness.

“I am gonna check it out. Wait here, Louis.” Mario grabbed his shotgun and tightened his grip on it.

“You’re not gonna leave me here alone, man.” Louis started to feel his blood pressure rising. “That devil is out there.”

“What did I tell you, stupid? He’s not the Devil. If he were the Devil, he would make me disappear before I had the chance to scream.” Mario laughed. “Now stay here, I’ll be right back.” And then he stepped into the darkness.

Shadow Chaser listened to their conversation and remembered what happened on the night of that drug deal. He also recalled the false information he received from the bug during that meeting.

Stavros almost had me fooled with his scheme. It’s a good thing I knew that those hit men were waiting for me, or it could’ve gotten ugly—real ugly. Shadow Chaser thought as he observed Mario walking in his direction.

“Excellent. Now, is the time to take the offence.” Shadow Chaser dove from the boxes to the ground. With cat-like reflexes, he positioned

himself without Mario even hearing him, or knowing the better. Mario stood three yards away from a trap—unaware that the dark stranger awaited his next move.

Mario pointed his shotgun, aimed it all around him, and shouted, “Come out, come out wherever you are.”

“As you wish.” Shadow Chaser grabbed Mario from behind and took him out with a sleeper hold. Seconds later, he cuffed the goon with his manacles. Before he left the scene, the dark hero took off Mario’s shoes and gagged him with his own pair of socks.

“I hope that you wash them frequently,” Shadow Chaser said. The mask he wore covered his smile.

Louis became more anxious by the minute. Mario had been gone for about ten minutes, and he should have returned by now. Sweat dripped from the tip of his nose, his body reeking of perspiration. His heart pounded faster. Faster. In the end, he snapped the silence with the tension of his own anxiety.

“Mario, where the hell are you? Come on, man.” He trembled. “Stop this crap right now. I’m serious!” His speech pattern shifted from scared to terrified.

“Mmmfff!” The noise came from the area where Mario went.

Louis asked, “Mario, is that you?” Reluctant to continue, but his fear of failing Stavros outweighed his horror of the dark stranger. Louis shuffled towards the sound.

“Mario, where are you?” Louis probed again. “Where are you?” Louis turned around and saw a pair of red eyes staring back at him. Shadow Chaser’s left boot connected with Louis’s right hand. The thunderous blow sent the goon’s gun tumbling to the ground. The darkness made it impossible for Louis to find his lone insurance marker. The red eyes closed in, and the figure began to speak.

“Time to join your friend.” Shadow Chaser held onto a gun with a silencer attached.

“No. Don’t kill me, man,” Louis shouted, but the dark vigilante fired his weapon. A dart whistled towards him like a thin, fast wind through a crack. Seconds passed; then Louis fell to his knees.

Louis looked at the dart in his chest and said, “You drugged me, man.”

Shadow Chaser replied, **“I wouldn’t waste bullets on you, scum. I’m on a tight budget.”** Louis fell unconscious from the sleep-inducing drug.

“Two down, three to go.” Shadow Chaser left the thug and continued his crusade.

Stavros and the rest of his men were around the area when they heard a scream.

“That sounded like Louis,” one goon said.

Another goon approached Stavros and said, “I got that flashlight from your office like you asked, boss.”

“Give it to me. Now follow my lead.” The goons followed him. As they got closer to the back exit, they heard a strange muffled sound.

“Mmmmf! Mmmmf!” The noise grew louder.

“It’s coming from over there,” Stavros said while he shined the flashlight to the right. The goons followed the sound. One of them scouting the area almost tripped over a body.

The goon said, “Boss, it’s Mario!” Stavros and the others ran towards him.

“What happened here, Mario?” Stavros demanded, and yanked the socks out of his henchman’s mouth.

“It was the Shadow Chaser. He got me, and I think he got Louis, too,” Mario said. The glare from the flashlight began to annoy his eyes.

“Boss, I found Louis here. He’s fast asleep,” the other goon said.

“You trying to say that two of the top hitters in the syndicate got slapped around by some freak in a Halloween costume,” Stavros said with anger in his voice.

“He got us by surprise, boss,” Mario said while the other goon tended to Louis.

“It looks like he shot Louis with some sort of tranquilizer, boss,” the goon said.

Stavros took out his gun and said, “Well, he’s not gonna feel this then—will he.” Stavros aimed it at Louis’s head and fired.

Bramm! Bramm! Bramm!

The bullets pierced through Louis’s skull like a sewing needle through fabric. The rest of the men felt first disgust towards their employer; then a sense of anxiety, no one dared to debate the issue. Aware that the penalty for failure was death, the men remained silent. Mario watched the blood spilling to the ground and feared that he would soon be next.

“Boss, it wasn’t my fault. I tried to stop him,” Mario sobbed. “I honestly tried to stop him.”

“Mario, please. I hate to see a grown man cry. I know you tried, but don’t take it so hard,” Stavros said. “I have nothing against you, so I’m not going to kill you.” Then he untied Mario.

“You’re not?” Mario said, controlled by fear.

“No, I have too much respect for you. You’re like a son to me.”

“Thanks, boss,” Mario said.

“I don’t have the heart to shoot you.” Stavros looked at the third goon and said. “Jack, would you do the honours?”

“Yes, Mr. Stavros.” Jack aimed his machine gun at Mario.

“No, please. I’ll do anything,” Mario yelled.

“You had your chance. Waste him,” Stavros shouted. The goon fired upon his former colleague.

“Nooo,” Mario screamed, but they ignored his cry. Each round exploded like a cannon. When the smoke from the shots dissipated, they witnessed Mario’s lifeless, bloodstained body.

“Anybody else going to fail me now?” Stavros asked.

“No, boss. That Shadow Chaser guy is as good as dead,” they vowed.

“Good. Now, let’s get back to work. You three search the area; I will meet up with you later.”

“What are you gonna do, boss?” Jack said.

Stavros whispered, “I got a surprise for our friend.” And he left the area.

In the shadows, the dark vigilante had just witnessed the death of two of Stavros’s men. He did not care if the criminals would kill each other off. But Antonio Stavros did not play by the rules—even by the mob’s standards. Stavros needed no reason to kill. Shadow Chaser knew that he had to stop Stavros, now more than ever—even if it meant dying in the attempt.

Their deaths were ruthless, even for their kind. Even I never thought that Stavros would have gone over the edge as he did a few minutes ago. Shadow Chaser thought. I have to get the child out of here. So, the only way you’re going to do that, Art, is to finish this now. Shadow Chaser noticed the last of the men walking around the area and looking for blood.

“Let’s see if they are ready for this.” Shadow Chaser plunged from the crate and drove two of the three goons to the ground.

Two heads cracked against each other, then the surface of the floor, rendering them unconscious.

“Shadow Chaser,” Jack screamed. The dark spectre with the red eyes turned and stared straight at him, as if it was judgment day.

“It’s over, scum.” Shadow Chaser bounced back to his feet and waited for Jack’s next move.

Jack took out his gun and said, “I’m not letting you take me!”

“The life of crime has already taken away your soul. Don’t let it take your life as well,” Shadow Chaser said. However, Jack would not listen.

“Screw you, freak.” Jack fired his handgun. Several bursts of fire came from the barrel as bullets sliced through the darkness. Shadow Chaser

shifted from side to side, evading the projectiles, and once again, he disappeared in the same way he appeared—in a shroud of mystery.

“Where did you go?” Before he could say another word, Jack felt somebody tapping his left shoulder.

Shadow Chaser replied, **“Over here.”** And struck the goon on the jaw. Jack moaned and staggered before colliding with some crates. The broken boxes crumbled like a house of cards underneath his weight.

It’s a good thing I had my grappling launcher, or I would not have been able to avoid harm’s way and take that fool by surprise. Shadow Chaser thought about the bullets meant for him. The darkness allowed him to make Jack believe he had just vanished into thin air. The echo of the crash faded, and dust began to clear from the area. Shadow Chaser made note of his surroundings one last time before going for the prize.

“Now, for the child. With those guns out of the way, I could get the boy out of here and come back for Stavros.” Shadow Chaser ambled towards the room.

Patrick feared for his life and hid in the dark, damp closet. He missed his parents, and he wanted to be with them. He remained in the closet, hushed, just as the man with the red eyes instructed him. Fifteen minutes ago, he was crying for his mommy when he spotted somebody entering the room. The stranger with the red eyes looked scary to the child. *I am not here to hurt you, Patrick. I’m here to take you to your mommy and daddy. A man is coming in the room. Don’t tell him I’m here.* Patrick remembered the words of the dark man. *Stay in the closet until I come back, kid. I have to take care of the bad men.* He continued to relive the incident and waited inside the closet for the man to return. Patrick heard the door open in the room. Footsteps approached louder and nearer by the second.

As the door opened, he shouted, “Mommy. Daddy.”

“Not yet, Patrick, but soon,” Shadow Chaser said. With the child cradled in his arms, Shadow Chaser headed towards the door.

“You came back, Mr. Red Eyes.”

“How about calling me Shadow Chaser, kid.”

“Why do you look so scary?”

“It’s to scare the bad guys.”

“Stupid bad guys.” The boy giggled.

“Yeah, stupid bad guys.” Shadow Chaser smirked along with the young child, but the levity became short-lived. A dozen halogens illuminated the room.

“Damn it, the lights are back. How the hell did that happened?”

Shadow Chaser pondered when a thought came to his mind.

“He has a backup generator. That son of a bitch,” Shadow Chaser said. The boy stared at his saviour.

“That’s a bad word, Shadow Chaser. You should not use bad words—it makes baby Jesus cry,” Patrick scolded the dark guardian.

Shadow Chaser replied, ***“You’re right, kid. Sorry.”*** Shadow Chaser realized how well the Collins’s had raised their boy.

“That’s okay. But you can’t have any desert when you bring me back home, okay.”

“Okay.” Shadow Chaser nodded, and they left the room.

Bramm! Bramm! Bramm! Bramm!

He heard the shots, but could not see the shooter nor where the bullets came from. He had no time to hesitate.

“Hang on, kid.” Shadow Chaser attempted to evade the bullets. Any other time Shadow Chaser would have been able to navigate with great ease. However, he had a child clinging to him, a child whose safety became paramount. Shadow Chaser vowed that the bullets would not hit his little body. The ghost of justice dodged the first three bullets, but the fourth penetrated his left leg.

Shadow Chaser groaned and collapsed into the crates. However, he made sure that he would take the blunt of the collision instead of the child.

“Are you okay?” the boy asked.

Shadow Chaser examined his leg and said, ***“I’m shot, kid. Run and hide in that crate over there.”*** Gunpowder and burned flesh perfumed the wound.

“The bad man is coming. I can’t leave you here.”

“Don’t worry about me, kid,” Shadow Chaser pushed him towards the crate. ***“Go!”*** The boy started to run while Shadow Chaser tried to rise from the bloodstained floor.

“Armor piercing bullet. Penetrated the body armor and an artery; I have to tighten the wound—or I’m dead.” Shadow Chaser took off his combat belt and tied it around the wound.

“That should slow down the bleeding,” he said. But before he could get to his feet, he felt a mysterious boot to the back, creating an additional sharp pain. His face caressed the floor.

Stavros towered the injured vigilante and boasted, “You don’t look so tough now, hero. And you bleed just like the rest of us.”

Shadow Chaser replied, “We will just see how tough I am, killer.” He used his other leg to trip his adversary. That move gave him a little more time to stand. However, Stavros had the advantage.

“I see that you’re a good fighter, Shadow Chaser,” Stavros said. “But let’s see how you do against me.” Stavros demonstrated his mastery in the

martial arts. Shadow Chaser tried to evade to the best of his ability. If not for the lodged bullet in his leg, he would be able to demonstrate the skills a shadow art master had to offer. However, life, as Shadow Chaser knew, was not always easy or fair. The fight continued for several minutes until Stavros took the advantage.

I'm hurting bad. I lost the feeling in my leg. I am starting to lose my focus. His punches aren't helping either. Shadow Chaser thought, for the loss of blood had drained most of the life right out of him.

"Where's your courage now, freak," Stavros said, and begun to deliver blow after near lethal blow to the helpless Shadow Chaser.

"It's all over," Shadow Chaser said, and fell hard on the ground. Stavros strode towards his defeated opponent and laughed.

"I would like to see who is behind that mask and kill you. However, I want to waste that brat first, so you could hear the sound of the gun that will kill him. After, I will bring the kid's dead body to show you," Stavros said. "Then I'll kill you; so your blood will mingle with his." Stavros left to resume his search for the boy. After many minutes of deliriousness, Shadow Chaser started to regain consciousness. With no feeling in his leg, he feared that he might lose it. He knew that his life would end like this; taken out by the scum he vowed to battle. He knew that someday he would die at the hands of a powerful enemy or some lucky thug. He took that risk. He accepted that. But he regretted that he could not save the young child from the mob boss. Stavros will kill him for no reason at all.

I failed to save him as I failed to save my beloved Claire. Shadow Chaser found it difficult to breathe. While he lay there thinking about his failures, Shadow Chaser thought about his wife. He knew how much she cherished life. From that thought, a new drive appeared in both the Shadow Chaser and Arthur Brown.

"Claire didn't quit. Even when those monsters had her, she fought them until the end. I mustn't quit now," he said to himself. Shadow Chaser clutched the closest crate and pulled himself up from the ground.

"Hold on, Patrick. I'm coming" With the valour of a soldier, Shadow Chaser carried on with the fight.

Chapter 4

Stavros skulked through the warehouse and searched for the boy. Using his hatred as a compass, his eyes scanned the perimeter. He expected that Tomas Collins and the Shadow Chaser would succumb in this conflict. The boy would be his next victim.

“My sole regret is that I won’t be there to see Collins’s face when he gets his boy back in tiny pieces. As for the freak, I will miss the pursuit he provided. He was a good challenger, but Antonio Stavros always wins the war.” Stavros laughed when he heard a sound coming from the barrels carrying gasoline.

Stavros sang, “Oh, Patrick. I want to talk to you.” The little boy panicked.

“Get away from me, bad guy,” the boy yelled, and started to run.

“Got you, you little punk.” Stavros grabbed the child.

“Let me go, you big bully!”

Stavros replied, “As you wish.” And he threw the child on the crate. Patrick’s tiny frame collided with a steel barrel. The impact caused the top of the barrel to open, and the huge drum tipped to the side, flooding the floor with the flammable chemical. The steel cover made a huge clanging sound and bounced until it rolled to a rest.

“Stop hurting me, you big meanie!” the boy said. “I’m going to get my daddy after you!” The tears blurred his vision.

“It’s your dad that got you in this mess in the first place, you little bastard.”

Stavros aimed his gun towards Patrick.

“You just said a bad word. You’re in trouble now.” The boy stuck to his beliefs.

Stavros mocked the child’s fear and pain. “I don’t care.” And with his finger massaging the trigger, he watched the tears fell from the child’s eyes.

“The kid is right, scum. Don’t you know that you make baby Jesus cry?” a voice yelled from behind the mobster. Stavros turned around and cursed out the name of his greatest enemy.

“Shadow Chaser. Why don’t you know when to die?” Stavros screamed like a demon drenched in holy water; his attention shifted to the injured hero. **“Because if I would die, then you would win; and I am never going to give you that satisfaction,”** Shadow Chaser proclaimed.

“We shall see, freak.” Stavros aimed his gun and prepared to fire. Shadow Chaser felt like a mouse in a maze. Trapped with no other defensive option—but one. Taking off his hat, he threw it at Stavros’s weapon. With the steel trim around the tip of the hat, his fedora doubled as a powerful

weapon. If thrown right, it could break or slice through a bone. The hero hoped that his reflexes were superior to Stavros's aim. The fedora flew like a turbo-charged frisbee and connected with the gun, altering the aim sufficiently.

"Son of a bitch," Stavros squealed; the pain rushed to his head. His finger twitched, and a loud *bang* followed.

The bullet from the gun grazed the puddle on the floor and ignited an inferno. The flames coiled around the crates with barrels exploding, and debris flying to the roof. The hungry blaze consumed most of the oxygen in the room, and tar-black smoke spread throughout the warehouse. The aromas of burned wood and charred steel filled the area. The dark vigilante knew the smoke would soon travel into the child's lungs.

"Come on, Patrick. We are getting out of here." Shadow Chaser grabbed the child.

"Where can we go?" he sobbed.

"Up!" Shadow Chaser took out his grappling launcher and fired it for the top window. The hook smashed through the window and fastened itself to a steady roof beam. Shattered glass fell like rain, and Shadow Chaser covered the child from its razor-sharp shards. When it cleared, Shadow Chaser motioned to the child.

"You ready?"

"Yes."

"Let's do it." Shadow Chaser attempted to activate the launcher.

Stavros hollered, "No you don't." And then he grabbed the Shadow Chaser's injured leg, and they began to elevate towards the top. Flames fired ten feet above the ground. The child's chances of survival dwindled by the second. Shadow Chaser knew that he had to put a permanent end to this war.

Shadow Chaser said, ***"To God I send you, killer. May he be more merciful than I."*** The ghost of justice kicked him with his good leg.

"Nooo," Stavros yelled as he fell to flames below. The pair continued to propel towards the roof. Once they were outside, Shadow Chaser realized that, for the first time in his career, he had taken a human life. But for now, he had to put aside his conscience and focus his efforts on an immediate escape. He scrambled to the edge and deployed a belay device to lower them to the ground. When his feet landed, Shadow Chaser felt pain shooting through his leg, but struggled to continue.

"Get in the van," Shadow Chaser said, and the boy complied. Seconds later, he started the engine and left the harbour. The van drove away into the darkness while the building exploded behind them, leaving nothing but flames and buried, tortuous memories. Louder than an angry volcano, the powerful boom echoed over the city. Sirens blended in with the percussion

of the explosions and the crackling of the fire. Ashes from the debris fell like white snow and sprinkled over the harbour.

Once they arrived at the Collins residence, Shadow Chaser looked upon the boy one last time.

“You’re home, Patrick.”

“Are you coming with me?”

“No, I can’t, kid. Just promise me that you will always help someone in need. You think you can do that?”

“You bet. Bye, Shadow Chaser. Thank you for bringing me back to my mommy and my daddy,” Patrick said, holding out his arms.

“Anytime, kid.” Shadow Chaser hugged the child for a brief moment.

“Now, get out of here.” The dark hero opened the passenger door. The young boy waved at him and toddled towards his front door.

Tomas and Diana Collins sat on their sofa and held each other while they waited for some sort of news. They heard a rap on the door like angry drum. Collins rose and answered.

“Agent Flynn. Where is our son?”

Flynn hesitated at first, but said, “He fooled us, sir.” He looked at Taylor and added with false confidence. “But we will continue the search.”

“What you’re trying to say is that my son is still out there?” Collins said.

“Yes, but don’t give up on us yet, sir,” Flynn said. The phone rang. “Answer it. We will get things moving from here.” Flynn monitored the police bug.

“Hello.”

“Mr. Collins, this is the Shadow Chaser. Your son is safe, your money has been returned to you, and Antonio Stavros will never bother you again.”

“Who is this? Where is my son?”

Shadow Chaser replied, ***“Open the door, sir.”*** Agent Flynn took the phone from Collins.

He roared, “You again. You have no right to meddle in our business.” Flynn heard the phone click, and the line went dead. During that time, Tomas and Diana Collins moved towards the door. Both of them feared the call could have been someone’s sick joke, yet they had to open it.

“Mommy, Daddy,” Patrick screamed and hugged his parents.

“Patrick,” Diana shrieked like a banshee. The tears mixed with her makeup and moistened her son’s cheek.

Collins kissed the top of his head and cried, “My son!”

"I am okay, Mommy, Daddy. Shadow Chaser saved me," Patrick said when Flynn entered the conversation.

"Where is the bad guy that took you away?"

"He's in the fire. He made Shadow Chaser mad," Patrick said. Flynn grabbed his police radio to see if he could confirm the boy's story.

"Are there any reports of fire near town?" he asked.

"Funny you should mention that, sir. One of the warehouses at the harbour blew up. They were storing gasoline, and the place went up like a rocket," the voice said.

"Check the area. There may be some bodies inside. Flynn out." Flynn dashed for the front door.

"What are you planning to do?" Collins asked.

"I've been after this vigilante for a long time, and I'm going after him. I know he saved your son, but he broke the law. I have to go now, I'll be back later," Flynn said, and then he left the house. Collins looked at his wife and his child. They were a family again all because of a vigilante that cared.

"I hope you never find him, Agent Flynn."

Taking off his mask, Arthur Brown realized that he needed immediate medical attention before he bled to death. He knew the police would have an APB out on him, so he called the one man that he could trust, his friend Alexander Taylor. Brown, in his costume, used his car phone and hoped that he could reach his friend.

"Hello, Virginia. It's Art. Would Alex be in?" Brown asked while he tried to stay alert.

"Art, you sound terrible. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. I just need to talk to Alex."

"Just a moment," she said, and gave her husband the receiver.

"Hey, Art. Are you ready for dinner?"

"Alex, I'm hurt...bad. I have...to get to...the hospital." Brown felt dizzy and weak.

"Where are you?"

"I'll be at the... hotel in three...minutes."

"I'll wait for you at the front," Taylor said before he hung up.

"What was that all about, dear?" Virginia said.

"I just have to meet Art. He wants to show off a new invention, this shouldn't take long." Taylor smiled at his wife and left the room. He trekked towards the front exit and waited for his friend to arrive. Just as he approached the exit of the hotel, Brown's dark van appeared. Alex hopped in and found his friend bleeding from his left leg.

“Hey, buddy,” Brown said. Taylor helped Brown remove his combat suit
“Put your clothes on,” Taylor said, handing Brown his regular clothes.

“Thanks for... coming, Alex.”

“Why are you risking yourself out there, Art? There is no profit to be made in this venture.” Taylor took the wheel, started the engine, and drove to a private hospital, which he had made numerous donations to in the past.

Brown replied in agony. “Don’t fight with me today, Alex. I don’t expect you to understand.” Taylor knew that Arthur Brown bore the identity of the Shadow Chaser; but he did not believe in fighting a hopeless cause.

“Alright, just save your strength,” Taylor said, but before he could blink, Brown fell into unconsciousness.

Taylor yelled, “Art. Art. Hold on. We will be there shortly.” Taylor floored the pedal, and the van accelerated towards the hospital.

A few hours had passed since the hospital admitted Arthur Brown for the bullet wound to his leg; but the staff had no report to offer. Alexander Taylor lingered in the private waiting room for any news on the welfare of his friend. He anxiously awaited the doctor’s arrival, but he remained patient. The sterile-scented hospital could not remove the odour of fire emanating from Taylor jacket. He carried his semi-conscious friend to the emergency doors, and then the ER team took Brown away. Taylor never heard a peep since. After glancing through the same periodical for a third time, Taylor noticed the doctor walking towards him.

“Mr. Taylor, your friend will survive.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

“I do have some bad news, however. Because of the severe damage to his leg, I’m afraid that Mr. Brown will need the help of a cane for the rest of his days. I wish we could have done more.”

“As long as he lives, doctor. That’s good enough for me. But one more thing, doctor. I talked to your administrator and requested that this be kept confidential,” Taylor said. “I believe that if any information regarding this event is disclosed, donations from my foundation could be affected, and that would be most unfortunate.”

“I assure you, sir,” the doctor said, “it will remain confidential.”

“Thank you, doctor. May I see my friend?”

“Of course. Three doors down to your left,” he said. Taylor nodded at the doctor and walked into Brown’s room. His friend lay motionless in the bed and gazed at his wounded leg.

“Hi, Art. How are you holding out?”

“I’m fine, for a cripple. The doctor gave me the word.”

“I’m sorry, buddy.”

“Don’t be, Alex. You saved my life, but if you will excuse me, I think I need some shut-eye.”

“Sure. I’ll talk to you later,” Taylor said before he left the room. Brown lifted the bleach-scented sheet and looked at his leg. He remembered Antonio Stavros’s death cry when he had shaken the mob boss loose from his leg and delivered him to the inferno below. Brown will never forget the look on Stavros’s face as he plummeted to his death.

“Antonio Stavros is dead—and so is the Shadow Chaser,” he said. “A fitting end to both our kind.” Brown closed his eyes and fell asleep.

