

# KILLER TO DIE FOR



THE  
MACMASTER CHRONICLES

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*a novel by*

**JASON LORD CASE**

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BOOK TWO OF  
THE MACMASTER CHRONICLES

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NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated  
to Antonia Orozco.



## Chapter One

### Hey, Stranger

The Central Tavern was nothing special, just an average downtown dive with an old hardwood bar running down one side of the long, narrow room. The washrooms were in the back and, while relatively clean, were serviced with very old porcelain and beaten up delivery fixtures. The satin and velvet wallpaper above the 5-foot wooden wainscoting spoke of a different time, a time when the central parts of the city had been more conspicuous, more fashionable.

Johnny was behind the bar, moving slowly. There was nothing to be in a hurry for. It was the middle of the day. The regulars for lunch were there. Madge was in the back making sandwiches and slapping pickles on plates so old they had varicose veins. Johnny already knew who would be there and what they would order. Johnny had been standing there for years seeing the same crowd drinking the same thing for lunch. Nobody under 40 years old ever entered this establishment before six at night.

Everybody in the place turned to look when the blond man entered. It was not that there were not plenty of blonds in Cleveland, but this man had the lightly tanned leather look that can only be achieved in warmer climates and was rarely seen in February. The phrase “You’re not from around here, are you?” would have been as natural for them as a roast beef sandwich.

“What’ll it be?” asked Johnny. He already had a draft glass in his hand, wiping it off with a clean white towel.

The stranger glanced at the handles poking up behind the bar and ordered a domestic beer. His accent marked him as a foreigner.

As Johnny drew the beer, he asked if there would be anything else.

The stranger was scanning the lunch menu when the sirens alerted everyone in the bar that there was something going on about a block away.

“I’ll have one of these chicken sandwiches with french fries. Tell the cook to throw some Russian dressing on it as well.” The foreigner was evincing no interest in the police cars or whatever had drawn them to the area. “I’ll eat at that table.” He took his beer to said table and draped his trench coat over the back of a chair. Under the trench coat he was wearing a padded vest, generally the style for people even younger than himself. He left the vest on and snapped at the bottom. He sat facing the door.

Outside, the police were looking for somebody. They were driving around the neighborhood with their lights on but their sirens off. They were obviously certain that the object of their attention was in the immediate area.

The tanned blond man with the foreign accent finished his beer and called for another about the time his chicken sandwich was delivered to him by the portly Madge with the stained apron that smelled of bleach and grease. He ate slowly, relishing his meal.

The stranger was only half done with his meal when the door admitted the next arrival, a beefy, red faced, uniformed patrolman. He walked up to the bar after a sweeping examination of the patrons and asked Johnny how business was.

“Same as always, Sam. Beer’s cold and the food’s hot. What’ll it be?” Johnny had spoken with Sam many times, but the officer usually ate elsewhere.

“Looking for anyone new in the area. You ever see that guy before?”

“No. He got there about half hour ago. Had a couple of beers and a chicken sandwich.”

“Did he look nervous when he got here?”

“No, just walked in... Just walked in.”

“Thanks.”

The stranger was looking at the officer with natural curiosity, the same as everyone else in the bar.

Once again the door opened. This time it was Ham, a regular customer of the Central Tavern. He was ten minutes later than usual and would probably miss his third draft as a result.

“Damn. Somebody just blew away three niggers down the street.”

“What are you talking about?” Johnny asked.

“You know what I mean. Them greaseballs with their Cadillacs and their silk suits. Gimme a beer. Somebody went in that building they got down there and shot three of ‘em. That’s what I heard.”

Everybody turned their gaze from Ham to Sam. Officer Sam Hardy knew what was going on and they all saw it as his job to enlighten them as to the veracity of Ham’s story. He did not comment, however. Instead he moved from the bar where Ham was describing what he had seen in between slurps of draft beer.

The officer sat, uninvited, on the other side of the table from the newcomer. The stranger continued to eat, unperturbed but obviously curious.

After swallowing a mouthful of chicken with a sip of beer, he asked the officer how he could be of assistance. His accent marked him.

“What’s your business in Cleveland?” was the direct, almost insultingly so, question.

“I’m in the import/export business. I’m in Ohio looking at glass manufacturing machinery. The M&R Verano Company. In two days I’ll be west of Lansing, in Michigan, looking at a manufacturer’s site. Spun glass.”

“Spun glass?”

“Oh, uh, fiber glass you call it.”

“I see. Do you mind if I ask your name?”

“Of course not. I’m Russell O’mara. Have you ever considered getting into the import business? There is a lot of money to be made in importing wool, mutton, beef and lamb. The difference in the currency, currently, makes beef particularly attractive. Now I’m not talking about your high-end steaks, since they need to be fresh, I’m talking about the strong-tasting free range herds that we use for broth. The possibility is there for the investment and we have the product down under, but I need a viable market for this one. I’m currently working with several concerns in Colorado on the import of sheep. There have been some concerns with the...”, the stranger did not seem to need to breathe as he spoke. The spiel flowed forth unchecked.

Sam held up his hand, palm out and said, “Please, I’m only interested in why you are here, right now.”

“Well, I’m telling you. I’m looking to bring back some viable glass forming products. I won’t be buying them, of course; I’m merely here as a broker. I need to determine who has what we need and then establish an opinion of my own. There are businesses in Canberra that need the new equipment. Jars are a part of it. Kiwi jam is making a big splash in the States and we can grow some kiwi down under, let me tell you. We also got a need for spun glass insulation machines. If I can broker a proper deal this week, I can make me a good piece of change. Make it worthwhile to come up here in this miserable weather. How on Earth do you stand it up here in this climate anyway with all this snow and the salt on the roads and the...”, once again there was an outpouring of information without the speaker seeming to even breathe. Sam held up his hand and apologized for interrupting the Australian’s meal and made his getaway.

Once the officer was gone, the foreigner ordered another beer. The flow of words that had been gushing from his mouth stopped as if turned off at the tap. He finished his meal and slowly drank his beer. He paid for his meal and asked Johnny to call him a cab.

The Central Tavern went back to its regular routine. The television in the corner reported that the police were searching for someone who had entered a downtown building and wiped out the inhabitants. The police had found a huge cache of drugs and guns in the apartment and most of them wrote the incident off as gang related.

“No. I’m afraid the payment must be made in cash. It’s not that I don’t trust you, but things can be done with computers that I am not that familiar with.”

“Was there a problem with the transferred down payment?”

“Not so far as I can tell, but I need the cash.”

“Very well.”

The living room was a simple affair. The furniture was clean but not new. The paintings on the wall were done in acrylics, so they lacked the quality and depth of work done in oils. The carpets were thick but not expensive and were a brown color that hid all but the worst stains.

The man making the payment was dressed unpretentiously. He had an insulated, checked shirt in red, a kind of lumberjack fashion and cotton work pants with a hammer loop on one side. He could have been a worker in any factory, a fork truck driver in a lumberyard or a long-haul trucker. There was no indication that he was wealthy.

The home was identical to half a dozen different houses in the subdivision. While it was a good neighborhood, it did nothing to single out the inhabitants. It was no mansion, no obvious seat of power for the rich and

famous. It was just another home like all the others around it, in a neighborhood with manicured lawns and no sidewalks.

The guest topped six foot by a couple of inches. His sandy blond hair set off his well-tanned skin. His deep blue eyes missed nothing. He was wearing a padded vest and his trench coat and hat were thrown over the end of the sofa. One leg was cocked over the other, showing the flat sole of the cowboy boots. They were not the ideal footwear for February in Ohio.

“I’ll need to confirm that the job was completed as contracted,” the home owner said. His tone was as if he was discussing a roofing job.

“That won’t be a problem. Turn on the telly. It’s on all the news.”

The man in the red shirt picked up the remote control and turned the television to a local channel where the newscaster was reporting the weather. Sports news and some commercials followed the weather report and then a recap of the day’s news. The top story was of the killing of three drug dealers in a downtown apartment. This time the identity of the victims was given and photographs of them while they were still alive were aired. The police were asking for help in identifying a suspect in the shooting. The man seemed satisfied after the newscast was done. He excused himself and went upstairs. When he returned it was with a briefcase.

The guest had moved across the room when the resident came back down the stairs and he insisted the briefcase be opened so he saw the contents first. Despite the apparent ease of demeanor and casual attitude, the man was taking no unnecessary risks.

The briefcase was full of cash.

“Would you like to count it?” offered the resident.

“No, mate. If you try to cheat me, I’ll just kill you too.”

“I think I knew that.”

“It’s right then?”

“Yes. It’s all there. The agreed upon amount.” The homeowner was looking a bit stressed now.

“I’ll be off then.”

“Thank you again for your service.”

“The money is thanks enough. A fair day’s work for a fair day’s wage.”

“Yes. You know, you didn’t need to kill the other two. I was afraid you were going to ask for something for them.”

“We didn’t contract them, so you don’t need to pay. Just consider that community involvement; a public service. Blue light special is it?”

The homeowner laughed somewhat forcedly. He did not want this man staying any longer than he had to. Yes he had contracted the job, but now that it was over, the Australian assassin made him nervous.

He had contracted the job because the man he wanted dead had raped and disfigured his daughter. He had tried to get justice through the legal system and had run up against a brick wall. It was not long before his patience with the courts had ended. The lawyers stretched out the affair endlessly while the scumbag was still operating with business as usual. Justice was served now and the price had been paid. Now he started to think he had made a mistake. He thought he might now be subject to blackmail. What if this man told someone else what he had done and they wanted to squeeze him for more cash. His stomach began to hurt. He had done what he thought necessary. He had paid for that piece of walking filth to be cleaned from the street. He had balanced the books. Now he began to fear that it would not be over. That it would not be that easy.

In truth, he need not have worried. He was dealing with an honorable man.

## Chapter Two

### February in Michigan

Terry Kingston had no business trying to drive in Michigan in February. He considered himself a good driver and he was, in truth, competent on a good dry road but the roads are not dry in Michigan, in February. Nor are they good.

The State Administrators had neglected Michigan's infrastructure for so long that the roads were a disaster. The policy of trying to fix concrete roads with blacktop patches exacerbated the situation. Ice and snow combined with bad roads and a light, foreign vehicle could easily have been the formula for tragedy. Michigan's expressways have a seventy-mile-an-hour speed limit to top off the mix.

Four-wheel-drive pickups and Jeeps were flashing past and throwing slop on Terry's windshield as he drove the right hand lane about 55 miles an hour. The big diesel trucks were moving about the same speed he was and in the same lane.

The cell phone in his shirt pocket rang and he barely got it open in time to respond to the caller with "Gooday."

"No, it's not a particularly good day."

"Look, mate, I'm trying to be polite but I'm behind a huge bloody truck getting my kidneys pounded out by this shitty bloody road. I can't see a bloody thing through the snow and the salt and my windshield washers are frozen so I can't fix the problem. I may need to stop here and get a room for the night."

"I thought I had hired a real man."

"What you got, mate, is a man who knows better than to drive when he can't see what's in front of him."

"Well, what are you driving?"

"Japanese car."