

# Chapter 1

An explosion, then the sting of flying dirt and pebbles. A high-pitched ringing sounded in Jace's ears as he peered through the protective shield that was his arms. When the dust settled to let the intense light from the desert sun come through, he noticed the rock and sand wall in front of him was gone.

With the ringing drowning out all of the noise around him, Jace gripped his rifle, reflecting on the decisions that led him to this point. His goal was to save humanity from The Evolved. Humanity. To him, that meant never taking the life of a human. Out of all of his missions months after graduating from bootcamp, this one may have him break his promise. That was something he felt he couldn't do.

When he regained his senses, Jace pushed his back against the building he used for cover. The wall that had been in front of him couldn't have been destroyed by a grenade or artillery. The reports read the militia didn't have that kind of firepower. There must be Evolved somewhere, attacking with their uncanny abilities.

He looked over to the rest of his small squad across the street. They too were huddled in a thin alley, taking cover from the militia fire. Unlike Jace, the alley they hid in had no escape.

With his radio broken, Williams, the commanding officer of the squad, communicated to Jace via hand signals. "You cover fire. We move."

Jace nodded, then broke cover, staying low. Three easy targets presented themselves as he lifted his rifle. Human targets. Or at least human-looking. Until he was sure, he couldn't kill them.

He fired a short burst just as one of the targets took cover. He aimed at a second, who used a bullet hole-riddled car to protect him. Before Jace could take the shot, the second target fired back. The small section of the wall inches away from Jace's face burst into pieces. A sharp sting came from his cheek, but he stayed focused. He returned fire, a three-shot burst, with each shot just close enough to scare the second target into hiding. He then shot up at the third, who hid behind a building.

The suppressive fire was enough for his squadmates to make their move. One by one, they started to break cover to get to the other side of the street. Each of them fired wildly toward their attackers.

Jackson, the last of his squadmates, fell to the ground. He didn't trip, but the pavement suddenly melted, turning to some sort of thick liquid. Even though he was only buried hand and foot deep, Jackson visibly struggled to get up. Slowly, he was being consumed by the now slush concrete.

It was confirmed. Jace turned to call out at his commanding officer. "Evolved!"