

# The Resilient

Between the Forejudged

Adam K. Ogden

## Adam K. Ogden

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events contained therein are a product of the author's imagination. Any similarities to any events, places, or persons, living or dead, is strictly coincidental.

© 2023 by Adam K. Ogden

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this book may be reproduced, including the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher. Such is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property. Prior written permission must be obtained.

Published by Breakpoint Publishing, LLC

[www.breakpointpublishing.com](http://www.breakpointpublishing.com)

Breakpoint Publishing and associated logos are trademarks of Breakpoint Publishing, LLC

Front Cover Design by Adam K. Ogden

© 2023 by Adam K. Ogden

[www.adamkogden.com](http://www.adamkogden.com)

## **The Resilient:** Between the Forejudged

*When foes become allies against a common threat, a level of trust must be granted.*

*Unity in the face of destruction...*

# 1

**D**ANGER FOLLOWED MICHAEL EVERYWHERE. The clutches of the Federal Police restricted his lungs. Fear held his feet in place. The officers were right on top of him, coming for him and the people he cared about. Michael fought to keep them safe. Stepping in view of that delivery truck, he tried to give them more time. It was all he could do. His cure for the virus behind Regress had failed. They were once again on the run.

In a blur, everything changed. The truck sped past him with everyone on board except him. Hands pulled him through the open door and into the dark, cavernous trailer. Ryker's plan had been reckless. The officers had been quick to respond to the fire. But not as many as Michael would have expected. At least one other asset had come, doing what Ryker had said he would. The asset named Matthys had called most of the officers away, believing the fire to have been a diversion. People like him concerned Michael the most.

One of them still glared at him through the shadows of that delivery truck. Though Wesley kept him bound, Michael tried to not to look at Chet. He didn't like being a stowaway with two assets so close to him. What made him even more

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

uncomfortable was the fact that Ryker was the one driving the truck. During the escape, he had climbed into the cab and commandeered it. Michael could imagine the original driver tied up in the seat beside him. That mental picture didn't help his shaky trust in Ryker.

Left in the hands of an asset, Michael held his family close. He could only hope Ryker was taking them to the distribution centers. Agridemesne General had long disappeared into the distance. A faint column of smoke was all he could see on the dark horizon. The rear door continued to swing back and forth, clacking against the metal latch. There had been no time to secure it. No time to wait for the others to join them.

Nick had been left behind with Geo. The tears streamed from Michael's eyes. His son wasn't a sacrifice he was ever willing to make. If his son wouldn't forgive him before, Michael doubted if he ever would. Rebecca noticed his heartbreak as it dripped from his chin. She held him a little tighter. She felt it too.

For years they wondered what happened to their sons, wishing they could see them again. Michael never would have imagined he would be the one to put them in danger. But Nick was strong. The Federal Police had trained him to be an officer. He would know what to do. It was the only thought that could ease the pain Michael felt within him.

The truck came to a stop. For a moment, Michael hesitated to look through the open door, afraid of where they were. The tall, windowless structure outside was an unmistakable, however. Ryker had brought them to the distribution centers. He left from the cab of the truck and opened the back the rest of the way.

Beyond the truck, it was quiet. The sight was almost the same as it had the last time Michael had seen it—a parking lot full of cars surrounding the massive steel buildings. The

## Adam K. Ogden

difference now was that he was on the wrong side of the walls. With his only hope for the cure was somewhere within that hardened structure, he would have to find a way into Agent Larue's office.

"Alright, Mr. Anderton, we're following your plan now," Ryker said. "Where to?"

"Agent Larue of the FDA," Michael said. "She has an office here. And I'm pretty sure she works the afternoon shift. When I was here before, there was a training program happening about this time. It's where she found me."

"Meaning you currently have no plan for entry?"

Michael nodded sheepishly. "That was something I was hoping you could help with."

Releasing a heavy breath, Ryker rummaged through his pocket. He seemed distressed. Troubled. More so than Michael had noticed from him before. Perhaps he had become far more involved than he had intended. Michael hated asking for help. In the moment, all he could think about was getting to Larue and away from the officers that pursued them. Distraught over the loss of a lab, he had latched on to the thin hope that she would help him. She knew of the virus the Federation had tried to taint the food supply with. With the right persuasion, he felt he could convince her to help him solve it.

Ryker motioned for Michael to join him as he walked to the corner of the building toward the parking lot. With so many cars spread across it, it didn't seem plausible that much of the rest of the Federation was under a strict quarantine.

Across the lot, the building formed a corner. A smaller building, though still massive on its own, protruded from the much larger production areas. The only true window that was more than a sliver of glass was tucked away where they met. Behind it, security guards overlooked both the parking lot and the main entrance. This time, they weren't alone. Federal Police officers stood outside the entrance, illuminated by the light

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

beneath the overhang. Michael and Ryker kept close to the corner of the building so that they wouldn't be seen.

"I'm going alone," Ryker said. "With Federal Police here, the only way in is to not look suspicious. Once I discover Larue, I'll have her send for the rest of you."

"You can't," Michael said. "Larue won't just help us. I'll have to get her to open up to me like she did before."

Ryker pressed his mouth into a line and peeked around the corner again. "Fine. Follow my lead."

He removed two face masks from his pocket and handed one to Michael. It was wrinkled and twisted from being stolen from the hospital and kept in the crease of his jacket. Michael did his best to try to straighten it out. He didn't want its disheveled appearance drawing attention to his face. Ryker did the same.

With the masks shielding their identities, they walked around the building toward the entrance. The Federal Police stood motionless. Michael tried not to make eye contact with them. He held back as Ryker approached the guard's window and showed his identification. The guard looked at the ID and then at Ryker puzzled.

"Department of housing?" he asked.

"With this virus threat, we've partnered with social services to provide medicine to orphans," Ryker said. "At least we hope to, but it still needs FDA approval. My boss told me to contact an Agent Larue."

The guard set Ryker's card down and picked up the phone. Though Michael felt nervous, Ryker was unmoved as he waited. He kept his hands clasped behind his back, admiring the scenery. Even standing amidst officers monitoring the building, he seemed relaxed. He hadn't known the terror of being chased by them as Michael had. For Michael, it was all he could do to just appear calm.

## Adam K. Ogden

After a few moments, Larue stepped through the door. She looked tired. Even under the artificial lights, the dark circles under her eyes sunk deep behind her cheekbones. One hand clutched a cup of coffee. The other a stack of files.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Timmons, but I don't have much time to talk about charity tonight," Larue said.

"I understand, Agent, but I'm on a bit of deadline myself," Ryker said. "I can assure you it won't take but a minute of your time."

"Walk and talk," she said, beckoning them in.

Ryker walked step for step with Larue, fabricating an intricate story seamlessly. His dominant presence allowed Michael to stay in the background with only a passing mention from Larue. She didn't recognize him from their last encounter. Ryker was careful not mention him, keeping her talking about the charity he used as a cover story. He had yet to reveal their true intentions for being there.

Larue only appeared to be partially listening. Her thoughts were elsewhere. She led them to her small office, cluttered with stacks of papers and empty coffee cups. She did her best to straighten things, but there was only so much she could do.

"I apologize for the mess," she said as she offered Ryker a seat. "My bosses have me looking into the old shutdown case."

"A shutdown of the distribution centers?" Ryker asked with a raised brow.

"I'm sorry. I'm not allowed to talk about it."

"Is this about when they found that virus almost nine years ago?" Michael asked.

Ryker tried to hold him back, but it was Larue that had told him about what happened in the first place. A virus had been discovered in the distribution centers. The virus the Federation had used to infect its own people. Michael couldn't figure out why they would be investigating it. That was something he was sure the Federation would want to keep buried.



## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

Larue nodded. "I guess they haven't kept it as hushed as they thought if you know about it."

"Viruses are hard to keep contained," Michael said, tapping on his mask.

He quickly stopped when he realized he was drawing attention to his face. Larue was far more likely to recognize him from the news than their brief encounter. He didn't want her to associate him with the terrorists when he hoped for her help.

"For now, let's worry about the topic at hand," Ryker said. "I have a team of doctors waiting outside. If you'll permit us a conference room, we'll gladly wait there until you have a moment for us to present the medication."

"It could be a while," Larue said. "Unfortunately, this investigation takes priority."

"Take all the time you need."

Ryker stood from his seat and stretched his hand toward Larue. He had managed to find them a place to work. A place with accessible resources. The way he operated astounded Michael. He was always in control. But there was something troubling him. It was barely noticeable. Like most proficient liars, he was remarkable at hiding his thoughts.

Michael wondered what else he was keeping from them. The asset had gone from questioning them about Project Regress to willfully helping them. Something had changed. The investigation of the shutdowns wasn't the only thing that worried him. He had been anxious since Matthys arrived at Agridemesne General. There was more there too than he was willing to share.

## 2

THE CONFERENCE ROOM was perfect. It was reminiscent of the labs Michael had worked in before. A long table stretched across the center of it. One wall held a countertop well-lit from the row of cabinets above it. In the corner sat a computer to access their research. But the room was empty. There was no equipment for them to use.

Larue was already anxious to leave. Stress lines fanned from the corners of her red eyes. Her investigation into the shut-downs kept her overwhelmed. The night was only just beginning. From her appearance she was working far more hours than just a single shift. Michael hated to ask her for more than just a room, but an empty one was no better than the back of a moving delivery truck.

"Is there any way you can provide us with a few pieces of equipment?" he asked.

The very question seemed to exasperate the already exhausted agent, but she did her best to smile. The same kind of smile that she would have given her superiors had they asked her to do something. That smile quickly became puckered her lips as she began to think about Michael's request.

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

"I thought you just needed the medication approved," she countered. "That shouldn't be more than paperwork."

"We're...going to do some...preliminary testing. For the children," Michael stumbled, wishing his ability to create an excuse was as smooth as Ryker's. "Just want to make sure everything is as it should be."

"A lack of confidence in your own work already doesn't look good for you, but..." Larue checked her watch. "You do have plenty of time to test it before we can review it. I'll send someone by with what you need."

"Thank you, Agent Larue."

Larue started to leave, but Michael caught her studying him.

"Have we met before?"

Michael debated about telling her about their brief encounter, but quickly thought better of it. Not only had the news convinced the nation he was a terrorist, he had only met her because of Trent. After his former friend turned on him, he didn't want Larue to associate the two of them together. Trent had had his own mysterious reason for being there.

"No. I don't think so," he said.

Larue shrugged. She didn't question her recognition of Michael. There were too many other things on her mind.

Once she left, Michael sat down at the long table, thumbing through his old notebook. While he had a moment alone, he studied everything he had written, criticizing his own work. For months he had attempted to formulate his cure, wandering the Forbidden Zone with nothing but a notebook and his own broken memory. But it wasn't enough. Until LeFleur and Wesley were able to contribute, he never made much progress. The more pages he flipped through, the less legible they became. What Michael had thought were his greatest breakthroughs were incoherent scribbles on paper.

## Adam K. Ogden

Between the jagged marks on the pages, written in Tanya's hand, were the new notes of what they had discovered in LeFleur's lab. They had been so close. He wanted to try to find where they went wrong. It had to have been something simple. Something that they overlooked. Michael was determined to find it.

A bump at the door startled him. Behind it, two men with the FDA stood behind it. One on each end of a large silver crate, they began carrying in the equipment Michael had requested. At first, they appeared unbothered by their efforts, but by the third crate, they began to grumble. Michael overheard one of them mention the FDA's testing labs being restricted. He had wondered why Larue offered to bring the equipment to him, instead of allowing him to work where it was. He had assumed it was FDA policy to not let outsiders into their testing facilities, but it seemed to be more than just that. The investigation into the shutdowns had taken over their resources as well.

*Why has the Federation become concerned with the shutdowns?* Michael asked himself. It was something he couldn't figure out. An investigation would only reveal the Federation's secret. If the public found out their own government had released the terrorist's curse, there would be another revolt. More and more people would join the Red Rider cause. Wesley would want that. That would be more people to reignite his war. But Michael had seen enough war. He had already been manipulated into fighting against his future allies by making them seem as evil as the Northwyn terrorists.

He chose his cure. If he took away the Federation's weapon, there would be no reason for war. No reason for senseless violence. The people would no longer rejoice for their oppression. They would see the Federation for what it was.

As Michael continued studying his notes, he couldn't help but think of something the potentate had told him. He had said Michael didn't know how the Federation worked. Those in

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

charge weren't always aware of what occurred at levels beneath them. Sitting in an interrogation room, Michael didn't want to believe him then. He wasn't sure he wanted to believe it now. Potentate Zacchaeus was the supreme ruler of the Federation. The nation's wrongdoings were just as much his fault as Colonel Hempton's.

But if Zacchaeus was right, perhaps he didn't know what Hempton had done. Perhaps the investigation was legitimate, and he would uncover his own nation's wickedness. Michael laughed at his own thought. That was asking too much of a nation that had called its own citizens terrorists, hunting them down and murdering them.

Michael blocked his conversation with Zacchaeus from his mind. They were too close to a cure for him to be distracted. He had to find what LeFleur had missed. He was certain they would have solved it already had they not been discovered by Chet and the officers. Michael glanced at the computer sitting in the corner of the room. Any temptation he felt to access it was quelled by the memory of Chet. That was best left to Watch. He had no doubt she would be able to access LeFleur's research without the Federal Police knowing.

For now, he continued to study the words on the page as he impatiently waited for the others to arrive. Ryker had provided a clever excuse to bring them there, but nervousness still weighed on Michael. Every time the FDA agents bumped the walls or clattered equipment against a counter, he would flinch, afraid it was the Federal Police once again capturing his friends and family.

Once the FDA agents had finished unpacking, everything became still. Quiet. It was something he was no longer used to. He wasn't hiding from the Federal Police. Wasn't helping to orchestrate a war. He was just working. It was the most natural

## Adam K. Ogden

he had felt in months. They had left him alone with his thoughts and ideas.

It reminded him of all those long nights he had spent at the university creating the virus with Cade. He had been so determined then, pushing everything and everyone else out to accomplish it. Those efforts almost cost him Rebecca. They had often fought over him leaving her alone with their young sons, Nick and Nathan. For a moment, he considered if they would have been better off if she would have left him. They would have been safe.

Nothing had changed. Ever since Myers showed him the effects of the virus he had worked so hard to create, all he could focus on was creating the cure. He had exchanged one obsession for another. Both had been intended for good. Both had taken him away from his family. His want for the cure had left Rebecca stranded in Orthanton. Without Watch, he questioned whether or not he would have ever found her again.

Guilt flooded over Michael. Had he replaced his family with his need to correct his mistakes? Is that why his sons resented him so? He had convinced himself he was doing it for Rebecca and his family as much as himself. The only way to ever protect them was to stop the Federation from hunting him. He had to undo the mistakes he had made. The very ones that had allowed Rebecca to contract the virus as well.

Although he tried not think about it, he often found himself doubting how effective his primitive antidote ever was. He never had time to test it, and his time with Rebecca since then had been brief. She could have hidden it from him. He wondered if she felt herself slipping away just as he did.

Michael continued to flip through his notebook looking for things that could help both of them, until his finger caught too many pages, and he found himself on the last. On the page, there was nothing to do with the virus or the cure. But questions that had once filled his mind. Questions that angered him.

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

*What is Project Regress?*

The two words fell to the pit of Michael's stomach. There was his true motive. His anger with the Federation had crept in, clouding his judgement. The Federation had kidnapped its own citizens to enforce conformity. People like Rebecca had been stolen away for having beliefs that differed from their tyrannical views. But they weren't alone...

*Why were foreign diplomats working with the leaders of the Federation?*

The Federation was just a small fragment of the global reach of the Umbra Guild. The true monsters hidden in the shadows. The more Michael uncovered of their schemes, the less his cure became about Rebecca and about exposing the leaders of the nations.

Michael pushed his notebook away, cradling his face in his hands. He didn't like who he had become. His time with his friends and family in that three-room shack seemed like another life. He was once again the Michael Anderton the Federation had used to execute their plots.

Rebecca had always forgiven him, but she deserved better. Someone who could be as devoted to her and their family as he was to his work. His heart warred with his mind. As a father and husband, all he wanted was to be there for his family. After seeing Nick, he knew the consequences of his obsessions. But he knew he had no choice. He had tried to hide from his past for too long. Years spent in the Forbidden Zone did nothing but prolong the suffering and allow more to fester. The work had to be finished for the sake of himself, for her, and the people of the Federation.

But he didn't have to bear the burden alone. Everyone there had come because Michael asked them to trust him. They each shared the same goal. He looked at his frail and dirty notebook, closing the cover of it. Now wasn't the time to try to solve it.

## **Adam K. Ogden**

Instead, he went to the cases scattered around the room and began opening them. He began setting up the pieces of equipment, transforming the conference room into a well-organized laboratory. He wanted to have everything ready for the doctors, for Watch, for Maps. For Wesley and Rebecca. Each of them had their own role to play in creating the cure. It could no longer be his obsession. It was going to take them all to ever succeed.



# 3

**A**GENT LARUE. Ryker knew that name sounded familiar. Seeing her and hearing of the shutdowns, he had found himself following the trail of the lost investigation. She had been the mark of another asset—Asset Nine, Trent Allister. The man who had been murdered by Michael Anderton, or so the claim was made. It was no coincidence he had become a part of Anderton’s plan.

Ryker glanced back over his shoulder, glimpsing a small piece of the door he had left Anderton behind. He fought to silence his persistent suspicions of the man claimed to be a terrorist. He was in too deep not to let things continue to play out. With the truths he heard within the walls of the Umbra Guild, he was no longer certain of anything. He was following wherever his investigation led. And now, that investigation led him to the trail of another asset.

Nine’s business with Larue and the shutdowns was kept deeply confidential. Even the details surrounding the asset were only whispered among loyal friends. Years spent missing, but his moniker was never reissued. Then he was killed in a car accident transporting Anderton with only a single assignment

## Adam K. Ogden

ever given to him. Given the clandestine nature of their job, Ryker never considered it before, but with his new state of mind, it only added to the conspiracy he was attempting to unravel.

With Anderton's revelation to Larue, Ryker now knew the shutdowns were in response to a virus. If they were once again being investigated, Nine's assignment had been revived. Because of its nature and the people involved, Ryker couldn't help but consider it was somehow tied to Project Regress. He had helped to transport three of its members to that place.

Logic told him he was being played by Anderton. That he had cleverly gotten him to bring them there to infect the nation with a new weapon. But his instinct told him he was wrong. In his time with Anderton, he didn't find the malice that he had with his other marks.

And then there was the secrecy surrounding Nine's activities. Assets were assigned to protect government secrets, but Regress wasn't just a Federation secret. It was shared by the members of the Umbra Guild. People like Prime Minister Xiao openly discussing it with Chancellor Smithe. The more Ryker discovered, the more he began to feel alienated from the one thing he believed in.

Taking a deep breath, he walked past the Federal Police officers standing guard outside. Those he went toward, he had helped escape from their custody at the hospital. Being cautious not to alert them, he chose to allow Anderton more time to reveal his plan. Of all the people in his life, Anderton's motives seemed the most genuine. The only claims against him were about a war with Northwyn terrorists Ryker no longer believed in.

Ryker gathered the others, informing them of their cover identities. They were to be doctors working on a new medication with Anderton's daughter as the test patient. It was a thin story, but he wasn't expecting much scrutiny within

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

Agridemesne. Larue already had her hands full with the investigation. And the Federal Police presence was merely there to enforce the mandates to slow the current virus' spread.

He told the others where to go, but he didn't join them. Nine wasn't the only asset involved in what was happening there. He glared through the dim glow at Chet restrained to the wall of the truck like cargo. Chet had been shadowing a former participant in Project Regress for months. Perhaps he would have the answers he sought. If he could discover the truth of what the foreign nationals wanted to keep hidden, then perhaps he could learn his place within their world.

Ryker closed the back of the truck, immersing them in darkness. With his flashlight, he kept a light on Chet's face. It wasn't the Void, but it would do. In the silence, they were alone.

"In your time shadowing LeFleur, what did you learn?" he asked.

Chet stayed silent.

"C'mon, Chet. Make it easier on yourself. Have you ever heard the doctor mention Project Regress?"

Nothing. Not even a knowing twitch. LeFleur had kept that secret to himself. At least in name. But that didn't mean Chet didn't have answers. He just had to ask the right questions.

"Why did LeFleur come to Agridemesne?" he asked.

"I told you to meet with Garcia," Chet sneered. "You're the one who tracked him here, Seven."

"My assignment was to track. Yours was to shadow." Ryker turned off his small flashlight, surrounding them in blackness. Not even a silhouette of Chet remained, thought Ryker knew exactly where he was. "Do you remember asset training? The dark room in Metropolian. The Void."

"You don't scare me, Seven. You're not Colonel Hempton."

"You're right. I'm the one the colonel calls when he needs something done. Something the public can't know about.

## Adam K. Ogden

Sometimes that's to gather information. Such as what you know about Dr. Enri LeFleur."

Ryker silently stepped behind Chet, delivering those final words as a whisper behind his ear. Startled, Chet jumped forward, only to be snapped back by the restraints binding his hands above him.

"LeFleur's been—" Chet stopped himself short. "LeFleur's been working with Garcia the whole time."

"Don't lie to me. I do this for a living too. And I do it better. LeFleur's been working on what? What has he been doing since he left Metropolian?"

"He's been carrying on the work he started with Secretary Myers."

"Myers?" A detail that had been left out Ryker's initial investigation. Myers had become even more reclusive than the potentate, locking himself inside his secretarial mansion. Ryker had never been allowed to enter it. Perhaps if the good doctor had been working with such a private man, there *were* secrets they intended to keep.

"I thought you knew," Chet said. "I've seen the security tapes. The unaltered ones. Hempton shot Myers with a team of assets. I think there was more there than we've been led to believe."

"Spare me your conspiracies." Ryker gripped Chet by the shoulder, squeezing his thumb behind his collarbone. He said the words to maintain control, but Chet intrigued him. It seemed LeFleur's involvement ran deep. "What did the doctor work on with Myers to have you become so invested into looking into such an incident?"

"They were working on something involving the terrorist's curse. Something that threatened the Federation."

Project Regress! Ryker was sure of it. Its existence implicated everyone with power within the Federation. The terrorist's curse. The Anderton virus. Amnesiac. Ryker found himself

## The Resilient: Between the Forejudged

further believing Anderton's claim that the Federation itself caused the pandemic. If not on purpose, at least indirectly.

He was glad the room was dark so Chet couldn't see him. The man may have been inexperienced, but as an asset he would still be skilled enough to read the distress on Ryker's face. His core belief system had been stripped from him. He no longer trusted the mission. Nor did he trust those in command.

Ryker took a second to compose himself as he continued to intimidate Chet. He wouldn't allow himself to draw such radical conclusions without more evidence. He needed more than just Chet's theories, even if they were the same as others around him.

"Why would Hempton have the secretary of security terminated, and then make his coconspirator chief of medicine?" Ryker asked, as he found a hole in Chet's theory, returning a sense of security back to himself.

"He was being monitored by another asset," Chet said. "The Federation was watching him closely."

"Jezebel. I already know about her. She posed as his wife on account of his involvement with the Amnesiac serum."

"You're wrong. She was with him while he was with Myers."

"Then why was she not reassigned to the LeFleur case?"

"She vanished. Once LeFleur went on the run. Jezebel was in the wind."

That was something else the doctor had been hiding. Ryker knew enough. LeFleur may have been truly making a cure for the Anderton virus, but he was not without his own faults. His own demons he would have to answer for.

"I know you looked into it, if you've looked that deeply into LeFleur," Ryker said. "What happened to her?"

"I- I don't know."

## Adam K. Ogden

"I told you don't lie to me." Ryker cradled Chet's face in his hand.

"Honestly, I don't. I took the assignment because Command ordered it. It was my first. Keep eyes on LeFleur if the government needed him again. That's all I know."

Ryker took a breath. Chet was telling the truth. But his truth was telling. *Needed him again*. Chet had been assigned to LeFleur because Project Regress was still on going. For such involvement, it was the only reason he was still alive. The whispers surrounding it weren't just ghosts of a past failure. Just like the shutdowns. If the project was still active, what was its purpose?

"You've been very helpful, Chet," Ryker said, turning on his flashlight to illuminate the back of the delivery truck. "Now I need you to do one more thing for me. Call Command and get a watch report on a Janyx McClan and Brennan O'Hare."

"Why? What do they have to do with anything?"

"Call Command and get a watch report," Ryker repeated, keeping his voice stern and level. He couldn't let Chet know there was more he was concerned about. Another asset in play. "Do this, and I give you my word, you'll be free to go."

"You and I both know that won't happen."

"It doesn't look like you have many options."

Ryker handed him a phone and waited to hear Command's report. He kept his pistol—the clunky Federal Police issued one he had stolen from a grunt—pressed against Chet should he try to divulge too much information. The report came back fruitless. McClan hadn't been reported since Ryker's last update.

While Ryker was glad to hear it, the lack of an update still made him uneasy. He had seen his former partner Matthys scouring the halls for him in Agridemesne General. His vendetta against Ryker made him unpredictable. Despite his threats, he had yet to reveal Ryker's failure to Command. If he hadn't turned in McClan or O'Hare, then he also hadn't turned in Ryker's mark, Jake Vasher.

## **The Resilient:** Between the Forejudged

Knowing Matthys' underhandedness, they were somehow part of a bigger plan that he had yet to enact. Matthys may have tracked him to that city, but Ryker wasn't out of time yet. The delay allowed Ryker the opportunity to still uncover the truth of Project Regress. It was too big for Matthys not take interest, and too volatile for it to not stop him from seeking vengeance. And now, thanks to Chet, he had enough information to confront its former members.