

EVOLUTION BOOK ONE

Chapter One

September 19, 2003

Sean O'Brien slowly regained consciousness – not sure what happened and no idea where he was. He remembered the valet handing him the keys to his BMW, getting in the car and pulling out of the parking lot turning left. Then it hit him – the face in the rear-view mirror and the gun. O'Brien pulled over to the curb when he was told, expecting a car-jacking. That's when everything went black.

His head was pounding as he opened his eyes. O'Brien found himself hanging by his feet, bound and gagged over a cracked and stained linoleum floor. Panic set in as he tried to get his hands free from behind his back. He screamed. All that came out was a muffled squeal, the ball gag in his mouth saw to that. O'Brien spun around on the chain as he struggled, stopping as quickly as he started. He wasn't alone.

The man hanging next to him appeared to be unconscious; a trickle of dried blood on the right side of his neck. He was similarly trussed, hands behind his back with a ball gag in his mouth. O'Brien recognized him immediately: it was Tao. Mr. Tao, as he was known by all, was head of one of Chicago's largest Tongs. Seeing him hanging there added to O'Brien's confusion and panic.

Their abductor sat in the next room less than ten feet away, cloaked in darkness. He was leisurely smoking a Gurkha Beast while he waited. Now that O'Brien was awake Tao would be coming along shortly. He'd been busy while waiting for the effects of the sedative to wear off; cutting off most of his hair and shaving his beard while standing in the middle of a plastic drop cloth. When he finished, he wrapped up the clothes he'd been wearing, stuffing everything into a trash bag. He slipped into a pair brown cargo shorts and an old Emerson Lake and Palmer tee shirt from the Taurus tour. He'd picked it up in a re-sale shop in Cicero and cut the sleeves off.

There was a tattoo on his upper right arm. It was the word Juden in black, overlaid onto a yellow Star of David. The design was taken from the only picture of his grandfather he possessed. He could never find a picture of his grandmother, so he wore the Star in memory of them both. Beneath the tattoo were two sets of numbers. They were the identification numbers used for his grandparents when they were taken to Auschwitz.

He knew going in Tao would be a far more difficult target than the insurance executive. The elderly crime lord was rarely alone. It took five months to work his way close enough for Tao to even acknowledge him. It took another two months to set up a meeting under the pretense he wanted to purchase three girls. Tao was known in Chicago for running the majority of the Oriental massage parlors, as well as an excellent selection of high-end escorts. He was finally able to put together a meeting with Tao for Friday, September 19th to discuss the purchase.

Grabbing O'Brien would be easy. The insurance executive was a creature of habit. He ate at the Acadia on Wabash every Friday before driving to Plano in the western Chicago suburbs. O'Brien was an arrogant asshole, at least according to anyone who had dealings with him. He believed himself to be untouchable, primarily because of his long running relationship with Tao and the Tongs. O'Brien handled millions of dollars of property and health insurance for Tao's more legitimate operations. All his abductor had to do was slip into the back seat of the BMW while O'Brien ate, waiting until he came out.

O'Brien was stopped at a light several blocks from the Acadia when he spotted him in the rear-view mirror. The stranger put a gun to the back of his head, directing him to pull around the corner. Once the car was in park, O'Brien was injected with a dose of Etorphine, rendering him unconscious. The kidnapper stuffed the big Irishman in the trunk and then drove the black 735i to Chinatown for his meeting with Tao.

The kidnapper was known to Tao as James McDonald, a Scottish National and procurer of rare commodities for an elite clientele. McDonald arrived at the Golden Moon Restaurant at 8:45, parking near the rear entrance as he had the first two visits. His light brown hair was tinted red, as was his beard. Black horned rim glasses and blue contact lenses completed the disguise. McDonald always had a touch of plaid on him, as might be expected of a Scot, either in his tie or handkerchief. Tao believed McDonald to be vacationing in Chicago.

There were two guards loitering outside the entry, handguns flashing under their windbreakers. As before, they did an amateur-like and inefficient job of frisking him. (That would come back to haunt them.)

This was McDonald's third visit to the restaurant. He'd noted their youth, coupled with the reputation of Mr. Tao, made them overconfident. Not once had either of them checked the boots he always wore. After the cursory pat-down, the one called "Snake" escorted him through the kitchen to an office in the back.

"Would you like me to stay?" Snake inquired of Mr. Tao.

"That won't be necessary," Tao replied. "Get back out front with Chang. Keep your eyes open." Snake bowed, giving the red-headed man one last look before closing the door as he backed out of the room.

Tao stood, extending his hand. "Good evening, Mr. McDonald," he said, looking at his watch. "I see you are fifteen minutes early, a good sign." He motioned to the chair in front of his desk. It was an old leather lounge chair, tattered along the seams but surprisingly comfortable.

"Good evening, Mr. Tao," McDonald responded with a very passable Scottish brogue. "I don't like to keep people waiting. My father taught me it was inconsiderate."

Mr. Tao nodded. "It is indeed. Your consideration is appreciated. You are always prompt and have never kept me waiting, a rare thing these days. May I offer you some tea?"

"Thank you, yes," said McDonald, accepting the proffered cup with both hands. He took a sip and smiled. "Good tea, Mr. Tao, as always."

The two men sipped their tea for about 5 minutes making small talk, mostly about Tao's love for his Chicago Bears. He was quite the football fan, which somewhat surprised McDonald. He knew better than to attempt to steer a conversation with this man. Tao was notoriously slow-paced when talking, prone to wandering off topic on the most innocuous subjects. Tao used those times to evaluate the man in front of him. He would test their patience, knowledge of world events and personality traits. It gave him insight into the type of man he was dealing with.

Tao was a very patient man and expected it in return. Tonight however, there would be no stories or parables. It was time to do business. He was satisfied that McDonald wasn't a vice-cop or affiliated with any law-enforcement entity or rival gang. He'd received assurances from his contact in the Chicago Dark Lords that McDonald was legitimate, well-funded and as reliable as he was discreet.

"Mr. McDonald," said Tao, "I understand you wish to make a purchase from me."

"I do," McDonald replied. "I am in the market for three entertainers for a client of mine in Edinburgh."

"Edinburgh is in Scotland, is it not? Why then, do you wish to deal with me for this purchase?" asked Tao. "Surely there are numerous European suppliers much closer, the Russians for example."

McDonald nodded. "That is true. However, I am here in Chicago, and my client desires delivery within the week. He is accustomed to prompt service and I don't wish to tarnish my reputation by failing to fill his order in a timely manner. One week doesn't allow me the time to procure the product through normal channels. That is why I have come to you, Mr. Tao." McDonald continued, "I've been told by several trusted contacts here in Chicago, that your quality is far superior to that of the former Communists. My client has a penchant for oriental ladies and from what I hear, none can compare to the women of Tao." McDonald watched the old man's face light up from the flattery.

"I am curious though," Tao commented as he leaned back in his chair. "Who do you normally use as suppliers?" asked Tao, feeling McDonald out.

"With all due respect, Mr. Tao, that would be my business, certainly none of yours." McDonald leaned forward for emphasis, "If it were that easy to get me to divulge my clients and contacts, I would have been dead years ago."

Tao smiled, "I agree, Mr. McDonald. In fact, I would have been most disappointed had you responded in any other fashion. Discretion is a character trait that is crucial to our business." McDonald had just passed another of Tao's tests.

McDonald replied politely, "I sincerely hope that I did not offend you, Mr. Tao, with the directness of my response. I assure you it was not my intent," ending the statement with a nod of his head.

Tao returned the nod. "No apology required, Mr. McDonald. You were direct. That is a quality I respect. It is imperative no one question your discretion when it comes to your, shall we say, business partners."

McDonald smiled and took off his glasses, slowly twisting off the right temple. It contained a needle with a small dose of Etorphine. The dosage would be enough to render Tao unconscious, but not enough to keep him that way more than 30 minutes. Now all he needed was the opportunity to make his move.

"Do you have photos of the product?" asked McDonald.

“Of course,” replied Tao. “Six very lovely oriental girls to choose from, all 18 years of age as you requested. Three are Japanese, one is Chinese and the other two are Thai. I find the Thai women particularly intriguing myself,” added Tao a bit whimsically. He opened a manila folder on the left side of his desk, spreading out pictures of six very beautiful, very naked Oriental girls.

“May I?” McDonald asked as he stood, craning his neck as if to get a better look.

“Certainly,” said Tao, turning the folder towards him. McDonald moved to the left side of the desk, his right hand at his side. As Tao turned his attention back to the photos McDonald struck with speed and accuracy, plunging the needle into Tao’s carotid. The reaction was swift as the elderly man slumped over the desk.

McDonald had to move quickly. Tao was light, which would be an advantage when it came time to carry him out. He searched the desk, locating a .40 caliber Sig Sauer p320 in the upper right drawer, right where he expected to find a weapon. No silencer, but that wasn’t a concern. He tucked the Sig into the back of his pants, retrieved a compact Tanfoglio Witness P and silencer from his right foot, and a 16-round clip from the left. The Italian made Tanfoglio was loaded with hollow point 9mm’s. The rounds would provide maximum impact while minimizing the possibility of a through and through.

One of the ballistic traits of a full metal jacketed 9mm was penetration, sometimes to the point of hitting unintended subjects behind the target.

McDonald opened the back door to the office, locating the exit at the end of a short hallway. The door had a panic bar labeled with a warning that an alarm would sound when opened. He wondered to himself if it was armed. If it was, he’d have plenty of lead on Snake and Chang. What McDonald didn’t know was there were two more guards posted out back.

He tossed Tao over his shoulder, heading for the door and the BMW sitting close to the exit. A loud pulsating sound hit him when he opened the door. “Fuck!” McDonald exclaimed as two very surprised guards turned towards him.

Dumping Tao unceremoniously on the ground, McDonald fired two rounds at the man on the left as he was bringing up his weapon. He put the first bullet in the guard’s chest and the second in his head. As the dead man hit the ground, McDonald dropped to one knee, using Tao as partial cover.

The second guard had his weapon up, another Uzi from the look of it, but he hesitated when he saw Tao in the line of fire. That was all the time needed for McDonald to put two in his torso. The guard fell to his knees looking down at his wounds. The third bullet hit him in the forehead, knocking him over backwards.

McDonald scooped up Tao in one arm and ran to the BMW, tossing him in the back seat. As he opened the front door shots rang out from behind him. Chang and Snake were coming around the corner.

The first shot hit the roof of the car just to the right of McDonald’s head. The second caught him on the outside of his left thigh before he could get his leg in the door. Swearing to himself, McDonald fired up the engine and floored it, smoke billowing from the rear wheels. He spun the car hard to the right while lowering the passenger side window.

McDonald spotted Chang first, who was turning to follow the car, firing in the direction of the BMW. The second shot from the Tanfoglio found its mark in the center of Chang’s chest, dropping him to the ground.

Snake dove behind a parked Camry for cover. McDonald fired continuously through the passenger window as the BMW sped through the parking lot. Seconds later, Snake lay dead behind the Toyota, one of the rounds having hit him just below his right ear. He never even got off a shot.

Coming out of the lot, McDonald took a right on Archer and then a hard left, arriving at Halstead and 21st Street less than two minutes later. He took the alley around back of the vacant three-story red brick building on the corner, pulling to a stop and cutting the engine.

McDonald gave himself a cursory examination of the gunshot wound to his thigh. It wasn’t as bad as it could have been. There was blood, but it wasn’t flowing freely. He took off his shirt, fashioning a temporary dressing for his leg. He picked up sirens in the distant, working their way towards the restaurant. He punched a number in his cell and hit send.

“It’s me,” said McDonald, when the call was answered. “I might need some stitches,” he added with a chuckle. “I caught a round in the left thigh.” He listened for a minute or so. “No, it’s not bad, a through and through. The bleeding’s already begun to slow. I’ve got a field dressing on it that should do for now.”

McDonald listened another minute. “Negative. No one comes to the kill zone, unless they have a serious death wish. I’ll shoot first and identify later.”

After a short pause he responded. “Yes, I have both targets.”

“The cops are heading this way. I’ll fill you in later.” Without further ado, McDonald ended the call.

The car was all but invisible behind the building with the black BMW tucked in the shadows under the fire escape.

McDonald glanced at the south east corner and saw a shadow moving in the shadows. A red laser dot appeared and disappeared quickly. His look-out was in place. Seconds later a Chicago patrol car shot by on Halstead, heading south. McDonald waited five minutes. One more cop car had blown by seconds after the first, but nothing since then. Satisfied that would be it for now, he went to work.

CHAPTER TWO

Tao moaned as he was pulled from the car. He got another shot of Etorphine for his efforts. That would keep him out for another hour. If the dosages worked as planned, both men would regain consciousness with minutes of each other.

At 6’2 and 190 pounds, McDonald was in excellent shape. His daily regimen of weights and flexibility had paid off over the years. He was stronger than he appeared and very agile. McDonald took Tao up the stairs first, draping both of them in a black sheet to blend into the shadows. He took the Chinaman into the back room on the third floor, securing his hands and feet with zip-cuffs.

Getting O’Brien up was a bit more of a challenge. The Irishman outweighed him by a good 30 pounds. He used a fireman’s carry to get him up the stairs, banging O’Brien’s head off the rail twice which made McDonald grin. Once on the third floor, he dumped O’Brien next to Tao.

McDonald bound O’Brien’s hands and feet and went to work hanging pulleys from the 3” water main running just below the 9’ ceiling. He had two lengths of 3/8” steel chain with clevis hooks on both ends. He wrapped one end around their ankles with a second wrap between and hooked the clevis. The other end went through the pulley. Once he had their heads roughly 2 feet off the floor, McDonald hooked the other clevis and went into the next room to change.

Tao came around about 5 minutes after O’Brien. His reaction was more subdued. Perhaps, it was because of Tao’s age, or maybe his approach to life and death. Regardless, he didn’t struggle as he looked around the room.

McDonald, his hair cut and the beard gone, entered the room. He had a cigar in one hand and a K-bar in the other. Pulling the door shut behind him, he turned on a battery operated LED lantern in the windowless room. McDonald approached Tao first. “I’m certain you’re aware shouting for help will be of no use. I took the liberty of sound-proofing the room. I am going remove your gag so you can speak. Please, rest assured if you become unruly I will not hesitate to silence you. Nod if you understand.”

Tao nodded with as much dignity as he could manage. The ball gag came off with a slip of the knife. “Thank you,” said Tao, surprisingly. “The gag was most uncomfortable.”

McDonald didn’t answer, turning to O’Brien. “Mr. O’Brien, I believe you’ll be somewhat more inclined to scream than Mr. Tao. The same rule applies. If you raise your voice above a conversational tone, you won’t like the results.”

McDonald paused for a moment, evaluating the Irishman, “I see fear in your eyes, Sean, and it is well justified. The question is, do you want to die immediately or would you like to see if there is a way out of this alive?”

O’Brien stared at McDonald with a mixture of fear, anger, frustration and confusion. He slowly nodded his head in agreement to the terms. As soon as the ball gag was removed, O’Brien asked angrily, “Who in the fuck are you?”

McDonald smiled. “My name is irrelevant; however my presence is anything but. If you want to call me something, you can call me sir.”

O’Brien snorted in derision, “Sir? Why the fuck would I call a worthless piece of shit like you sir?”

McDonald laid the knife and cigar down, a bone-chilling smile on his face. When he straightened back up he went to work on O’Brien.

Tao, watching from his precarious position, was fairly certain that O'Brien got hit 6 or 7 times in less than five seconds. Every punch found a vulnerable spot. McDonald hit him in the nose, stomach, kidneys and both sides of the head. The end result was an unconscious O'Brien, blood running from his broken nose to the floor below.

"Impressive," said Tao, "although I am not inclined to call you, sir, either. It is not a question of respect, but more so a matter of courtesy. Since I am going to die tonight, I wish to know the name of the man that will send me to my ancestors." Tao smiled, "Yes, I know that I am going to die, in spite of your deceptive offer of hope to Mr. O'Brien. I also wish to know the reason why we have been destined to die at your hand."

McDonald stood with his arms folded, a whisp of smoke rising from the cigar he'd retrieved. "Mr. Tao, I admire your calmness in light of your impending death. It is honorable, serving your ancestors well. As for my name, knowing it will make no difference in light of what's to come. It's Lazarus, although I have associates who kiddingly refer to me as a chameleon, given my talent for changing appearances. It was me after all, who met with you under the guise of McDonald."

Tao nodded with understanding. "I never would have made the connection. Now that you have cut your hair, removed the beard and blue contacts, I am beginning to understand what they mean. You are very much like a chameleon. I will choose to die thinking of you as THE Chameleon, a name, not a description. It fits you well." Tao sighed, "May I ask how I am to die?"

Lazarus, eyes dark as coal, responded. "Most likely you will die slowly. You have a debt to pay. A life for a life and I am here to collect it."

"And as for Mr. O'Brien?" asked Tao.

"The same, I am collecting two lives for one. If not for you, he wouldn't be here. If not for him, you wouldn't be here. It is because of you both that a young Japanese girl had her life destroyed. She is now in my care. She will remain there, free to live however she may choose."

Tao looked puzzled. "This girl, she is your child?"

"Not at all," Lazarus replied. "I met her for the first time last December."

"Then I don't understand your desire for vengeance," said Tao. "If she isn't your family, what difference does it make to you concerning the life of one worthless girl?"

It was Tao's turn to taste Lazarus' rage. Without comment, Lazarus slapped and back-handed Tao 4 times in rapid succession. He then leaned in close, whispering in Tao's ear, "Her life matters to me," said Lazarus, as calmly as though they were discussing their favorite flowers. "Yours however, does not."

Anger flashed in Tao's eyes at the humiliation of being slapped like a woman. His voice carried an edge as he spoke again. "You know who I am."

Lazarus laughed, "Of course I do. You are the infamous, Tao; the soon to be former head of Chicago's largest Chinese Tong." He continued with his cold smile, "That's why you're here. You're responsible for anything that happens in your Tong. It doesn't matter to me whether you knew this girl or not. You're responsible for your men getting her addicted to heroin, abusing and forcing her into prostitution. Then, as if her life wasn't bad enough, you sold her to this pitiful excuse of a human being hanging next to you." Lazarus moved closer, drawing on his cigar. "She spent two years being routinely beaten and raped by this worthless piece of shit." Lazarus nodded in O'Brien's direction, "All for twenty-five thousand fucking dollars."

O'Brien moaned as he began to come around. Lazarus lifted his head to look him in the eyes. "Will I have to repeat myself?" he asked with a look that sent chills up O'Brien's spine. "No," O'Brien replied. He then flinched, "I mean no, sir."

"That's a good boy, Sean," said Lazarus. "Now, let's get you up to speed with Mr. Tao as to why you both are here tonight."

Lazarus took three pictures from his pocket. The first was a photo of the oriental girl at the age of 13, when she lived in a convent on the south side of Chicago. In the second photo, she was 15, shortly before she was sold to O'Brien. The third was taken last December, after Lazarus removed her from O'Brien's house. Recognition was slow to come to O'Brien, understandably so with the beating he had just taken. "You stole my girl?" he stated as much as asked. "I always thought she just ran away." He added almost wistfully, "She was a damn good little f..." catching himself as Lazarus pulled back his right arm. O'Brien flinched and closed his eyes. "Sorry, sir," he said. "I thought she escaped on her own."

O'Brien looked at Lazarus from the corner of his eye. "I suppose you're going to beat me and teach me a lesson?" Even as he spoke, O'Brien realized that would be the least of what was to come. He could see death in those black pits disguised as eyes.

"Something along those lines," replied Lazarus in a whisper.

Lazarus turned his attention back to Tao. "Will I need to gag you while I teach Mr. O'Brien his lesson?"

Tao shook his head. "I am not a woman like this pathetic creature. Gag him if you want to silence someone," he stated rather than asked. "I have no desire that the last sounds I hear in this world be O'Brien, crying for mercy when there is none to be found."

Lazarus bowed, bringing a smile to the Chinaman's face. "Even now you show me respect, Chameleon. It will be an honor to die by your hand." Tao added with as much dignity he could, "If you are able to find it within you, may my death be swift and clean?"

Lazarus studied Tao for almost a minute before turning away without comment. He had no intentions of letting Tao off easy. In Lazarus' mind, it wouldn't be justice if Tao didn't suffer for his sins as O'Brien would.