



**JEFF  
SOMERS  
COLLECTIONS**  
a novel



# COLLECTIONS

## Chapter 35

by Jeff Somers

**35.**

I knew The Second Coming of Alt James was going to ram the cops the moment he herded us into his sleek, stolen SUV with the heated seats and the individual television screens, and winked at me as he backed away to slam the door, gun trained on us. “Let’s see if we can’t draw my twin out from the shadows with a little rumpshaker, huh? Fasten those seatbelts, y’all,” he said, smiling.

“Shit,” The Bumble said, sounding happy. “He’s going to fucking ram them.”

We both sat there with ridiculous, inappropriate smiles on our faces. I wasn’t sure what The Bumble was thinking, but my heart was racing as I pictured it: Bodies in the air, sparks grinding between the vehicles, the thud and thump of the tires rolling over people, the chaos, the pain, the excitement of it. The glorious part of it was that I was a prisoner, powerless, and thus free from guilt.

The Second Coming of Alt James put the SUV into gear and it rolled soundlessly down off the overpass. With a little goose of the gas pedal he hopped the curb and cut over a small island of sidewalk, popping out onto the main approach to the warehouse parking lot. The lot was surrounded by a chain link fence sprouting from a low concrete wall, but the entrance was a double gate thrown wide open.



Headlights off, he moved at a crawl towards the huge structure ahead. We could see the cops clearly enough; there were evenly spaced streetlamps sprouting from the blacktop every twenty feet or so, giving off an eerie orange glow. The cops, still milling about like they owned the fucking world, secure that their badges and guns would protect them from anything, didn't notice us. For a few seconds we glided along in silence, wrapped in darkness. The Second Coming held his automatic up in the air so The Bumble and I could see it, one hand casually on the steering wheel, his own seatbelt cinched tight over his wide chest.

When we were half a long block away, he hit the gas, and we all jerked back into our seats.

It was eerie, but no one noticed us until right before we slammed into them. At the last second there was this moment of stillness, shock, paralysis, where all of them turned almost as one and stared into the grill of the truck. A surge of adrenaline swept through me, carrying away all the pain and aches, all the weariness, filling me with electricity and making my mouth dry up like a desert. Then we crashed into a knot of people as the night erupted into screams, and time snapped back to normal speed, everything in flashes. The SUV clipped the butt end of one of the Rape Vans and we spun, moving sideways and scraping over three or four bodies before smacking into the side of the warehouse, my teeth leaping in my mouth.

The Second Coming was out of the SUV before I could even orient myself, popping out with guns in both hands. I watched him feeling something akin to awe as he moved low and easy, throwing shots. With one hand he almost casually put bullets into the prone bodies littered around the truck, while with the other he tracked the surviving cops as they ran for cover behind the vans and trucks,



pulling their own weapons and shouting. He put down one more with an impossible shot before he'd chased them all behind cover.

The Bumble started to move, but I put my hand on his shoulder. "Wait. No one but James knows we're in here, and this is the whole damn point: Let them kill each other."

He sagged back into the leather, grimacing. "Yeah," he said, and turned his head to watch out the passenger window.

Almost casually, The Second Coming moved behind one of the vans between us and three cops who'd gathered behind one of their own SUVs. Two more were using the other van as cover. I counted five of them down, most likely all dead, and wondered how fucking lucky we were as a universe to have gotten *my* Stanley James, who hadn't been above a shakedown and been kind of a pain in the ass, but generally a good enough cop, a good enough person. Reasonable. Not a bloodthirsty killer like every other Stanley James I'd met so far.

The Second Coming was moving, then, gingerly backing his way down the length of the van, popping out from behind it on the other end, completely exposed to the five cops crouching ten feet away. He poured fire at them, hitting two of them almost instantly and flushing the other three up and out, firing back as they scrambled to the next truck for new cover, their shots wild. The Second Coming took his time, following them to their previous spot.

Suddenly, some distance away, there was a second or two of a loud, eardrum searing noise, like static from the world's largest radio. It there and gone, making my whole body tense up. When I focused on the parking lot again, James and the cops didn't seem to have moved, but Frank's men were pouring out of the warehouse, shouting, moving behind the SUV we were in for cover. Mentally I set my stopwatch for police involvement at about five minutes, with all



the noise going on. Although it was *Newark*. That was a variable I couldn't handicap.

Frank's guys didn't know what to do, at first. They didn't know who any of these other assholes were. Just as Frank himself emerged from the warehouse, smoking a cigarette and holding his bandaged hand up like a talisman in front of him, his men spotted The Second Coming. With shouts and yells they started firing at the SUV he was hiding behind. The cops—who I was actually starting to feel sorry for—started firing their weapons more or less in every direction at once, displaying the sort of training and calm I'd come to expect from city police. I had to admit, in all fairness, that your Captain and chief dirty cop suddenly ramming into you with a truck and shooting at you was probably unsettling, and probably hadn't been covered at the fucking academy.

Bullets slapped into our SUV, surprisingly loud, sending a shuddering vibration through the whole chassis that made The Bumble and me sink down in our seats, cursing and jerking. Frank's men as one unit decamped for the Van The Second Coming had recently been using as cover. Peeking up over the dashboard I could see Frank just standing there smoking, like nothing in the world could ever hurt him.

I leaned over and eased the lock of my door open. "Stay here," I said to Billy. Without waiting for a response, I pushed the door open just enough for me to slip out onto the pavement, silently pushing it closed behind me. Not ten feet away, Frank stood watching, red in the face and puffing away at his cigarette. It was amazing, but no one was paying any attention to him. The idea that I'd gotten everyone together just so Frank could miraculously survive was a sudden and heavy anxiety, and I thought if there was ever a time to get over my



phobia of guns, this was it. All or nothing.

I dropped to the greasy, gritty pavement and pushed myself under the SUV. On the other side lay one of the dead cops, a big guy with a shaved head burned red and angry from the sun, peeling in spots, his gingerish hair in a monk's halo just over his ears. His gun was still holstered in the small of his back, and I crawled under the car towards him, reaching out gingerly as shots banged out just a few feet away, making me cringe and wince each time.

Another drawn-out second of ear-bleeding static filled the air just as I managed to unsnap the holster and take hold of the gun, a snub-nosed revolver of some sort. By the time I'd rolled back towards the other side of the car, the noise had stopped again. I didn't pause to think on it. I had a few moments while everyone was busy, while Frank was distracted, in which to enact a little insurance.

I crawled out from under the SUV and pushed up onto my feet. Moving slowly, I crept over to where Frank stood, holding the heavy gun down by my leg and angled away from me so if it went off I wouldn't shoot myself. I'd fired a few guns in my time, when circumstances had forced me to, but they always seemed to vibrate in my hand like an unexploded bomb, waiting for one more little jerk or tremor to set them off. My heart was beating fast and my hands shook a little as I angled my way back towards the warehouse wall in shadows created by the amber streetlights I got myself lined up directly behind Frank's pudgy, slump-shouldered form. Reminding myself not to get in too close where he could grab at me—Frank had gotten fat, but he was a scrapper, and knew how to fight—I crept forward until I was close enough to reach out and push the gun into the small of his back.

"Hi, Frank."



I felt like an asshole. He went stiff and jerked his arms a little, then caught himself and went still, not turning around to look at me. I felt the moment draining away even as I arrived. I should have just shot him, I knew it. I told myself to just do it, to not stretch this out and let him think. But I couldn't. I found myself frozen. I'd never just killed a man like that, cold, mechanical. I'd had a few moments where I knew I *could* have killed someone, but I'd warmed up to it, the violence boiling up and over and carrying me along until The Bumble or someone pulled me away, dragging me off. This was clinical and I found I didn't have the belly for it.

"Jesus," Frank said loudly over the roar of gunshots, turning his head finally to get me into his peripheral vision. In front of him, The Second Coming dashed behind the other rape van, dropping clips from his guns and crouching low, hunted by a dozen people but still looking like *he* was in charge. "You're fucking supernatural, you know that?"

"Shut up," I said. Ridiculous. I'd *started* the fucking conversation. Sweat rolled into my eyes and I thought I should just start beating him, get the blood flowing, and then I'd be able to do it. But I wasn't angry. I didn't feel angry and strong, untouchable like I usually did when I got into the mood to hurt someone. I felt stupid and hollow.

As I watched The Second Coming, the original Alt James walked into my vision behind him, like my vision had blurred.

He was wearing full police riot gear: SWAT uniform, body armor, helmet with visor up. A semiautomatic rifle was slung over one shoulder, and he held an automatic in one hand. He didn't hesitate or say anything; he walked up behind The Second Coming, put the auto to his head, and pulled the trigger. There was a brief geyser of red jetting from The Second Coming's forehead, and then he crumpled to



the ground. I stared in dumb shock; it was like one Stanley James had been plucked away, rubbed out of the picture, replaced by a new version.

I heard something behind me, and then the barrel of a gun was pressed into *my* back.

“Drop it, *asshole*,” Chino breathed into my ear, his breath smelling like cigarettes and hot dogs. “I don’ wanna have to shoot you, and miss out on knockin’ your teeth out, *entienda?*”

Alt James looked over at us, and smiled, pointing his gun at Frank carefully. All the noise had suddenly stopped.

“What do you say, Mr. McKenna?” he shouted cheerfully. “How about a truce?”