



# Designated Survivor

## Chapter 8

by Jeff Somers

8.

Five minutes before he saw it, Renicks was walking through every square foot of the suite. Trying to notice everything. Cataloging resources, familiarizing himself with the layout.

He started in the office space, where Begley had wriggled under the main desk with a small toolbox. Working the plates free from the wall, stripping the wiring of insulation. Trying anything that might patch them through to a live connection. It was a good use of her time, since she obviously knew the wiring and how to manipulate it. He left her to it.

The office was easy enough. Aside from the furniture and computer equipment, there was paper in the fax machine and printer, and a few basic office supplies in the desk drawers. A shallow closet in the back of the room also contained a large plastic toolbox and a set of walkie-talkies in a charger, all operational. He wondered if they were on the same frequency as the one he'd seen Begley use earlier.

There was a loud bang behind him, and then a stream of profanity. Without turning to look, he exited the office. Directly across from it was the small kitchen and one of the bathrooms. The kitchen was a claustrophobic square; full-sized oven, fridge,

sink. Insufficient cabinetry. A toaster and microwave ate up half the counter space. Unattractive. Greasy white laminate, blond wood trim. The oven's finish had been scratched and had lines of rust forming a pattern on it. The floor was tiled in huge, twenty-four inch stone tiles, light gray. The tile had been laid without gaps or grout, right up against each other. The huge tiles just made the room feel smaller.

He opened everything. The cabinets contained a variety of dried and canned food: Vegetables, noodles, pasta, beans. Powdered milk. Powdered drinks of all kinds. Canned meat, sausages and SPAM, tuna in foil packets. There was a full set of dented and rusted pots and pans, chipped plates and dull metal cutlery. Everything you would need to prepare horrifying meals of salt and sugar and botulism, he thought.

The oven was empty. He regretted opening it. When he opened the fridge he paused for a moment, staring at dozens of bottles of wine, water, and beer, placed inside with care, using every available inch of space.

He shut the door slowly, thinking that if they hadn't figured something out in two hours or so, he was coming back to have one hell of a party.

The bathroom was cheap-looking. It was a standard three-piece: Sink, toilet, plastic shower stall. The medicine cabinet was empty. There were two sets of towels and washcloths, white and thin, laundered a million times. He took one of the towels and tucked it under his arm. Towels, he thought, were always massively useful things.

When he stepped back into the narrow hall, he could still hear Begley cursing in the office, even over the keening noise of the

locks being cut. Passing through the entry room, he glanced at the sparks flying. Noted they had shifted downward about six inches. One lock down, he assumed.

On the other side of the suite were the two bedrooms and second bathroom.

At first glance, the bedrooms were identical in size and crammed with bunk beds. Six beds in each room. The beds were modular and could be separated and, he assumed, stored elsewhere. He wondered why the default configuration was to assume he would be bunking down with eleven people, why they wouldn't leave the extra beds somewhere else until needed. The beds were all made up, with sheets and blankets and thin, unhappy pillows. There was nothing else in the bedroom on the right. No dressers, or chests, or decoration of any kind.

The bedroom on the left had a closet. It was shallow and not very practical for storing clothes in the standard way. Which he assumed the designers had realized, since it was filled with automatic weapons. Rifles. Magazines. He didn't know anything about automatic rifles, and they seemed to glow with a negative black light, shiny and perfect. Maybe never used. He closed the closet door and wondered if he should report his discovery to Begley. Then realized she must know, this was her house. She'd probably been trained on them. Could take them apart, put them back together.

Then he thought they shouldn't trust anything they found in the suite. They'd brought something to cut through the door with. Maybe they'd thought to empty the magazines, too. Or replace them with blanks.

He glanced at the towel. Considered it. Then shrugged.

The second bathroom was exactly the same as the first, with the addition of an exciting mold smell. He compared towels and decided to keep the one he had.

Back in the office, Begley lay on the floor under the desk, grunting and cursing. She was pulling plates off the wall and yanking wires free. He rolled the big desk chair a few feet away from her and sat down. Pulled the Brick from his pocket. It lit up as he touched it, coming to life.

“Are you always this calm?”

Renicks glanced over at Begley. She had pushed her head out from under the desk at an uncomfortable angle. Glaring at him. He imagined she was used to contorting herself just to glare at people. He reflected that all the women in his life accused him of being too calm.

“This isn’t calm,” he said. “Should I be running around? I don’t know the systems here; you do. So you’re tearing wires out of the wall. I’ve got this,” he held up the Brick, “which only I can access. So I’m looking through it to see if there’s anything here that can help. There must be *something* in the classified documents of the President that can help.”

She snorted, pulling herself back under the desk. He allowed himself to admire her lower half for a second.

“I’d feel better if you were running around,” she said.

He nodded and returned his attention to the Brick. It was a remarkable device. It was palm-sized and about as thick as a small paperback book. It was all screen. There were no buttons. No obvious power source. All interaction was through the touch-screen.

When he put it down, it went dark. When he picked it up, it

came to life automatically. Somehow it knew when he was holding it.

The interface was graphical, the screen filled with tiny icons. There were no applications that he could see. Just documents and folders. Hundreds, thousands. Maybe *tens* of thousands. There were dozens of folders, most marked with mysterious acronyms or single words he assumed were codenames. He thought of Amesley and the team of people that would normally be at his disposal. People who could explain everything to him. The Brick was just to ensure he had access to the information the Acting President might need. It didn't clarify anything.

He thumbed his way through the list of folders, ignoring the unsorted documents. He scanned quickly; despite Begley's assertion that it would take hours to cut through the locks on the entrance, he was impatient and worried. He didn't think it was likely that Begley would have some brilliant inspiration and connect them to rescuers.

Two folders jumped out at him almost immediately. The first was named ELIRO. The all-caps title caught his eye and he stared at it for a moment. Hesitated because he thought he'd seen the acronym before. He spent a few seconds running the letters around his mind. He had the buzzing sense that their meaning was locked away in his head. That at any moment it would be illuminated. Maybe a memo he'd seen, or a project he'd discussed with the President.

He opened the folder with a tap of his index finger. It expanded to fill the screen. Contained a single text file, also called ELIRO. With a tap he opened the file. The first line was in English:

*History will forgive me.*

He scanned the rest. The first words in were *dum tre longa tempo nun*, and it continued from there, nonsense. Or a code.

He closed his eyes for a second and imagined the words. *Dum tre longa tempo nun*. He'd always enjoyed codes and word games, but these remained meaningless. Thinking that if it was a code there might be a key, so he closed the file and then the folder. With a growing sense of urgency he pushed his eyes past the icon and kept searching, eventually stopping with a start on a folder marked CONT\_EX\_STE.

Vowels were luxuries. He quickly translated this to *continuity executive suit* and with a sharp jab of his finger the folder swelled up to take up the entirety of the small screen. It contained a dozen or so subfolders with inscrutable names, and a single unsorted text file called NSDD\_E1.

He glanced at Begley's legs. Tapped the file open. It was a short document, containing just three paragraphs of text in plain English. The first two he skipped quickly. They were legalese. Long sentences citing authority, precedents, and routing procedures.

The third paragraph was only three sentences long. He read it twice, heart pounding. Then he looked up at Begley's lower half.

"I know how to get out of here."