



[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
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[REDACTED] survivor

Jeff
Somers

Designated Survivor

Chapters 49

by Jeff Somers

49.

Five minutes before discovering he had just two rounds left in the Kimber, Renicks was shaking as he stepped over Frank Darmity's body. Darmity's eyes were staring up at him, a surprised and somehow pathetic expression on his face. As he did so, the blinding light suddenly faded, in seconds, leaving him blind again wearing the woman's dark goggles.

He tore them off and knelt next to Begley. He didn't try to move her. He checked for a pulse and found it, thin and shaky. Panic. The taste of it in his mouth.

He knelt there, shaking, the Kimber, recovered from its hiding place, still in his hand. He spent a few seconds considering his options. He could try to drag her back up to Level Nine, to the medical office. Five ladders, carrying her. While she bled like a slaughtered hog. Stopping on every landing out of necessity, gasping for breath, rubbing at his aching ankle. He could try to pack the wound with his shirt, wrapped tight with something, then carry her up. Either scenario would have left the cavern undefended, and Begley had said it herself: They didn't know how many there were. Another team could be making their way down. The whole complex could be blown.

If he didn't do anything, she was going to die. Bleed to death in the bowels of this complex. He knew immediately that he couldn't allow that.

He pushed the Kimber into his waistband. The move felt natural. No longer like pretending to be something. He gently rolled her onto her back. He purposefully didn't examine her wound. Or note the way the blood seeped out of it. He tore the stinking, charred body armor off. Tore the buttons of his shirt ripping it off. Shivering in his undershirt, he folded his dirty shirt into a thick square and pushed it down onto the wound. He took off his belt and wrapped it around her midsection, cinching it tight to hold the shirt in place.

Then he turned to face away from her, took her by the feet, and began dragging her.

He moved as quickly as he could manage. Nothing to be gained by being gentle. He pulled her out of the cavern, past the unconscious woman in body armor, her leg snagged by his small game snare. He hesitated. Had a vision of her coming to, alone. Hunching over the black box, setting the charges.

He heard Begley in his head. *Jack, we're going to have to kill them.*

He let her legs drop. Walked over to the woman. She'd taken a nasty bang to the head from a large rock with a sharp edge, and had bled fiercely. He walked back to the blast door and unhooked the snare from the outcropping he'd snagged it on. Working as quickly as he could, he hogtied the woman, tying the snare wire around her ankles, then tugging it cruelly tight and tying it off around her wrists so that she was bent backwards. The wire sank into his skin and blood welled up around it.

He picked up Begley's legs again. Resume dragging her.

The fourteenth level was quiet and still as he moved back through it. Breathing heavily and sweating freely, he continued to shiver. It was cold and damp.

Behind him, he heard Begley moan suddenly. Then fall silent again.

Just as he turned the corner, bringing the ladder into view. He stopped in his tracks.

First, because of the spectacularly dead man lying on the floor. The smell of the blood was heavy in the air. His face had been almost shaved off by his little trap. And Darmity and the others had just left him there. No, he squinted at the body. They'd shot him in the head.

A wave of nausea swept Renicks. The emergency, the desperation of just half an hour before was gone. Evaporated. Might have been a fever, a paranoid imagining. And he'd killed this man in the most painful way possible.

As he stood there, shocked, there was a soft noise in the distance. A bell-like sound. Cheerful and dainty.

The elevator arriving.

For two staggering heartbeats he stood in dull surprise. Anger flooded him. *Now?* After everything. After all this, there was *more?*

He wanted to scream and throw things. He stood there paralyzed with anger.

Sucking in air, he closed his eyes for one second. *Move*, he told himself. Now was not the time to let everything swamp him, pull him under, drown him.

He looked at the ladder. His fishing line had been removed,

naturally enough. He could hear commotion from further down the hall. Muted voices. The on-off rasp of a radio. He didn't think he would be able to pull Begley up the ladder quickly enough. They would be on them when he was still visible, grunting and struggling with her weight.

He pulled the Kimber from his pants and checked it. A round in the chamber. One in the magazine.

Two.

A numb sort of frustration settled onto him. He spun in place. Looked down at the corpse. The assault rifle the man had been carrying — unfamiliar and bizarre-looking to Renicks, was still trapped under him. Renicks looked up the corridor. Whoever was coming was close. He stopped and asked himself, *are you really going to try to hold off whoever's coming?*

Better, he thought, to let them move past.

He left the rifle, and the corpse, where it was. Dragged Begley roughly to one side, leaving a clear path. Undid the belt around her waist and tore off the blood-soaked shirt. Put it back on. Reached down and touched Begley's blood, smeared it on his hands. Then on his face and neck. Then he lay down in it, composed himself, and closed his eyes.

He didn't try to stop breathing. It would just lead to a sudden choking gasp at exactly the wrong moment. And he didn't think it would stop anyone from shooting them in the head just to make sure. But he doubted anyone would bother to check.

It was a very long time before they came. It had seemed like they were so close, so near. Just around the corner. But after he went still and closed his eyes, hoping to blend into the gore. He concentrated on breathing. Shallow. Through the nose. The

coppery smell of blood like acid, making him want to sneeze.

Then they came.

Aside from the tap of their boots on the floor, they were disturbingly silent. He heard them moving around him. Breathing. Fabric moving. Another sudden burst of radio static, a distorted voice, suddenly cut off. He heard them stop. The scrape of a boot.

“Jesus.” A man’s voice. A hoarse whisper.

“Clusterfuck,” someone else said. A brisk, flat voice. Midwestern, Renicks thought. “Okay, we got another asshole here — holy fuck, what happened to this shithead? — and two civvies, it looks like.”

“She’s Secret Service,” a woman said.

“What?” A third man’s voice. Alarm pulsed through Renicks. He knew the voice. For a second its identity remained elusive, and he struggled to stay completely still. He heard someone moving rapidly towards him. Felt someone kneeling down next to him. Heard him breathing.

“It’s Jack Renicks.”

Renicks felt a hand on his throat as he opened his eyes. He realized he was smiling.

“Hello, Stan.”

Stan Waters stared down at him with tired, puffy eyes, dark circles making them look sunken. A thin, tall man with a round, shaved head. He had a boyish, soft face offset by dark, serious eyes.

It was Stan’s eyes that had always made people take him seriously.

For a second he smiled dumbly back at Renicks.

“For Christ sake’s Jack,” he said gently. “You were supposed to stay in the fucking Panic Room.”

Renicks laughed. It foamed out of him, easy, light. He nodded. Stan blinked dumbly, then surged back up to his feet.

“Captain — we need med evac!” he shouted. “Now!”

“Mr. Waters, our brief is — ”

“Your brief is under my fucking office for this operation, Captain, and I’ve had men with more troops under his command than you assassinated before, so send a runner up the fucking elevator shaft and get a fucking med evac done here *now*.”

Renicks closed his eyes again. Fell asleep almost instantly.