

DAGGER QUEST by Edward Hochsmann

EXCERPT

The 252s launch a chemical attack on Ben and Simmons on Resolution Key:

Ben had already spent one magazine and slammed another into the carbine, resuming fire. His pistol was also charged and ready. Suddenly, there was a pause in the firing, and all the targets were out of sight. Ben glanced left along the barrier and froze in shock. Bill was sprawled out face up behind Simmons, eyes open and blood leaking from a hole in his forehead.

“Eyes front!” Simmons whispered urgently.

Ben whirled back to peer at the SUVs and whispered, “What are they doing?”

“Retasking,” Simmons said, pulling a small package out of one of his pockets. “They’ll try to take us now for interrogation.”

“What do we do?”

“Don’t get taken.”

“Thanks.”

“No, I mean, whatever you have to do, DO NOT get taken by these guys.” He looked Ben in the eyes. “Nothing would be worse, believe me.”

“Right.”

Some activity behind his SUV attracted Ben’s attention. There was a “whump” sound, and a grapefruit-sized object sailed overhead their position.

“FACE DOWN!” Simmons shouted.

Ben turned and buried his face in the sand when a loud “pop” sounded overhead, followed by a “whir” and a stabbing pain in the back of his right leg. A severe muscle cramp-like pain spread over his body within seconds, and he could not move. He tried to shout in terror, but all he heard was, “Ahhhhhh!” He felt another prick in his neck, and the pain subsided, although he still could not seem to get his muscles to work.

“It was a micro-flechette with a tetrodotoxin derivative. I’ve given you the antidote, but it’ll be about thirty seconds before it’s fully effective,” Simmons whispered as he pulled the now empty syrette out of Ben’s neck. “Fight it! They’ll be rushing us in a few seconds—you need to be shooting.”