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EXECUTIVE  
ORDERS

THE NEW JACK RYAN NOVEL

Tom Clancy

Executive Orders

PROLOGUE: STARTING HERE

IT HAD TO BE THE SHOCK of the moment, Ryan thought. He seemed to be two people at the same time. One part of him looked out the window of the lunchroom of CNN's Washington bureau and saw the fires that grew from the remains of the Capitol building--yellow points springing up from an orange glow like some sort of ghastly floral arrangement, representing over a thousand lives that had been snuffed out not an hour earlier. Numbness suppressed grief for the moment, though he knew that would come, too, as pain always followed a hard blow to the face, but not right away. Once more, Death in all its horrid majesty had reached out for him. He'd seen it come, and stop, and withdraw, and the best thing to be said about it was that his children didn't know how close their young lives had come to an early conclusion. To them, it had simply been an accident they didn't understand. They were with their mother now, and they'd feel safe in her company while their father was away somewhere. It was a situation to which both they and he long since had unhappily become accustomed. And so John Patrick Ryan looked at the residue of Death, and one part of him as yet felt nothing. The other part of him looked at the same sight and knew that he had to do something, and though he struggled to be logical, logic wasn't winning, because logic didn't know what to do or where to start.

"Mr. President." It was the voice of Special Agent An-drea Price.

"Yes?" Ryan said without turning away from the window. Behind him--he could see the reflections in the window glass--six other Secret Service agents stood with weapons out to keep the others away. There had to be a score of CNN employees outside the door, gathered together partly from professional interest--they were news-people, after all--but mostly from simple human curiosity

at being face-to-face with a moment in history. They were wondering what it looked like to be there, and didn't quite get the fact that such events were the same for everyone. Whether presented with an auto accident or a sudden grave illness, the unprepared human mind just stopped and tried to make sense of the senseless--and the graver the test, the harder the recovery period. But at least people trained in crisis had procedures to fall back upon.

"Sir, we have to get you to--"

"Where? A place of safety? Where's that?" Jack asked, then quietly reproached himself for the cruelty of the question. At least twenty agents were part of the pyre a mile away, all of them friends of the men and women standing in the lunchroom with their new President. He had no right to transfer his discomfort to them. "My family?" he asked after a moment.

"The Marine Barracks, Eighth and I streets, as you ordered, sir."

Yes, it was good for them to be able to report that they'd carried out orders, Ryan thought with a slow nod. It was also good for him to know that his orders had been carried out. He had done one thing right, anyway. Was that something to build on?

"Sir, if this was part of an organized--" . "It wasn't. They never are, Andrea, are they?" President Ryan asked. He was surprised how tired his voice sounded, and reminded himself that shock and stress were more tiring than the most strenuous exercise. He didn't even seem to have the energy to shake his head and clear it.

"They can be," Special Agent Price pointed out.

Yes, I suppose she's right. "So what's the drill for this?"

"Kneecap," Price replied, meaning the National Emergency Airborne Command Post, a converted 747 kept at Andrews Air Force Base. Jack thought about the suggestion for a moment, then frowned.

"No, I can't run away. I think I have to go back there."

President Ryan pointed to the glow. Yes, that is where I belong, isn't it?

"No, sir, that's too dangerous."

"That's my place, Andrea."

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He's already thinking like a politician, Price thought, disappointed.

Ryan saw the look on her face and knew he'd have to explain. He'd learned something once, perhaps the only thing that applied at this moment, and the thought had appeared in his mind like a flashing highway sign. "It's a leadership function. They taught me that at Quantico. The troops have to see you doing the job. They have to know you're there for them." And I have to be sure that it's all real, that I actually am the President.

Was he?

The Secret Service thought so. He'd sworn the oath, spoken the words, invoked the name of God to bless his effort, but it had all been too soon and too fast. Hardly for the first time in his life, John Patrick Ryan closed his eyes and willed himself to awaken from this dream that was just too improbable to be real, and yet when he opened his eyes again the orange glow was still there, and the leaping yellow flames. He knew he'd spoken the words--he'd even given a little speech, hadn't he? But he could not remember a single word of it now.

Let's get to work, he'd said a minute earlier. He did remember that. An automatic thing to say. Did it mean anything?

Jack Ryan shook his head--it seemed a major accomplishment to do even that--then turned away from the window to look directly at the agents in the room.

"Okay. What's left?"

"Secretaries of Commerce and Interior," Special Agent Price responded, having been updated by her personal radio. "Commerce is in San Francisco. Interior is in New Mexico. They've already been summoned; the Air Force will bring them in. We've lost all the other Cabinet secretaries: Director Shaw, all nine Supreme Court justices, the Joint Chiefs. We're not sure how many members of Congress were absent when it happened."

"Mrs. Durling?"

Price shook her head. "She didn't get out, sir. The kids are at the White House."

Jack nodded bleakly at the additional tragedy, compressed his lips, and closed his eyes at the thought of one

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more thing he had to do personally. For the children of Roger and Anne Durling, it wasn't a public event. For them it was immediately and tragically simple: Mom and Dad had died, and they were now orphans. Jack had seen them, spoken with them--really nothing more than the smile and the "Hi" that one gave to another man's kids, but they were real children with faces and names--except their surnames were all that was left, and the faces would be contorted with shock and disbelief. They'd be like Jack, trying to blink away a nightmare that would not depart, but for them it'd be all the harder because of their age and vulnerability. "Do they know?"

"Yes, Mr. President," Andrea said. "They were watching TV, and the agents had to tell them. They have grandparents still alive, other family members. We're bringing them in, too." She didn't add that there was a drill for this, that at the Secret Service's operations center a few blocks west of the White House was a security file cabinet with sealed envelopes in which were contingency plans for all manner of obscene possibilities; this was merely one of them.

However, there were hundreds--no, thousands--of children without parents now, not just two. Jack had to set the Durling children aside for the moment. Hard as it was, it was also a relief to close the door on that task for the moment. He looked down at Agent Price again.

"You're telling me I'm the whole government right now?"

"It would seem that way, Mr. President. That's why we--"

"That's why /have to do the things I have to do." Jack headed to the door, startling the Secret Service agents into action by his impulse. There were cameras in the corridor. Ryan walked right past them, the leading wave of two agents clearing the rows of newspeople too shocked themselves to do much more than operate their cameras. Not a single question. That, Jack

thought without a smile, was a singular event. It didn't occur to him to wonder what his face looked like. An elevator was waiting, and thirty seconds later, he emerged into the capacious lobby. It had been cleared of people, except for agents, more than half

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of whom had submachine guns out, and pointed up at the ceiling. They must have come from elsewhere--there were more than he remembered from twenty minutes earlier. Then he saw that Marines stood outside, most of them improperly uniformed, some shivering in their red T-shirts over camouflaged "utility" trousers.

"We wanted the additional security," Price explained. "I asked for the assistance from the barracks."

"Yeah." Ryan nodded. Nobody would think it unseemly for the President of the United States to be surrounded by U.S. Marines at a time like this. They were kids, most of them, their smooth young faces showing no emotion at all--a dangerous state for people carrying weapons--their eyes surveying the parking lot like watchdogs, while tight hands gripped their rifles. A captain stood just outside the door, talking to an agent. When Ryan walked out, the Marine officer braced stiffly and saluted. So, he thinks it's real, too. Ryan nodded his acknowledgment and gestured to the nearest HMMWV.

"The Hill," President John Patrick Ryan ordered curtly.

The ride was quicker than he'd expected. Police had cordoned off all the main streets, and the fire trucks were already there, probably a general alarm, for whatever good it might do. The Secret Service Suburban--a cross between a stationwagon and a light truck--led off, its lights flashing and siren screaming, while the protective detail sweated and probably swore under its collective breath at the foolishness of their new "Boss," the in-house term for the President.

The tail of the 747 was remarkably intact--at least the rudder fin was, recognizable, like the fletching of an arrow buried in the side of a dead animal. The surprising part for Ryan was that the fire still burned. The Capitol had been a building of

stone, after all, but inside were wooden desks and vast quantities of paper, and God only knew what else that surrendered its substance to heat and oxygen. Aloft were military helicopters, circling like moths, their rotors reflecting the orange light back down at the ground. The red-and-white fire trucks were everywhere, their lights flashing red and white as well, giving additional color to

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the rising smoke and steam. Firefighters were racing about, and the ground was covered in hoses snaking to every hydrant in sight, bringing water to the pumpers. Many of the couplings leaked, producing little sprays of water that quickly froze in the cold night air.

The south end of the Capitol building was devastated. One could recognize the steps, but the columns and roof were gone, and the House chamber itself was a crater hidden by the rectangular lip of stones, their white color scorched and blackened with soot. To the north, the dome was down, sections of it recognizable, for it had been built of wrought iron during the Civil War, and several of the pie-slice sections had somehow retained their shape. A majority of the firefighting activity was there, where the center of the building had been. Countless hoses, some on the ground, some directed from the tips of aerial ladders and cherry-picker water towers, sprayed water in the hope of stopping the fire from spreading further, though from Ryan's vantage point there was no telling how successful the effort might be.

But the real story of the scene was the collection of ambulances, several knots of them, their paramedic crews standing with bitter idleness, folding stretchers before them, empty, the skilled crews with nothing to do but look at the white rudder fin with the red crane painted on it, also blackened from the fire, but still hatefully recognizable. Japan Airlines. The war with Japan had ended, everyone thought. But had it? Was this one lone, last act of defiance or revenge? Or just some hideously ironic accident? It hit Jack that the scene was very much like an auto accident, at least in kind if

vastly different in scale, and for the trained men and women who'd responded, it was the same story as with so many other calls--too late. Too late to stop the fire in time. Too late to save the lives they were sworn to rescue. Too late to make much of a difference at all.

The HMMWV pulled in close to the southeast corner of the building, just outside the gaggle of fire trucks, and before Ryan could step out, a full squad of Marines had him surrounded again. One of them, the captain, opened the door for the new President.

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"So, who's in charge?" Jack asked Agent Price. For the first time he noticed how bitterly cold the night was.

"I guess one of the firemen."

"Let's find him." Jack started walking toward a collection of pumpers. He was already starting to shiver in his light wool suit. The chiefs would be the ones with the white hats, right? And the regular cars, he remembered from his youth in Baltimore. Chiefs didn't ride in trucks. He spotted three red-painted sedans and angled that way.

"Damn it, Mr. President!" Andrea Price fairly screamed at him. Other agents ran to get in front, and the Marines couldn't decide whether to lead the group or to follow. There wasn't an entry in anyone's manual for this, and what rules the Secret Service had, their Boss had just invalidated. Then one of them had a thought and sprinted off to the nearest ladder truck. He returned with a rubberized turnout coat.

"This'll keep you warm, sir," Special Agent Raman promised, helping Ryan into it, and disguising him as one of the several hundred firefighters roaming around. Special Agent Price gave him an approving wink and nod, the first moment of almost-levity since the 747 had arrived at Capitol Hill. All the better that President Ryan didn't grasp the real reason for the heavy coat, she thought. This moment would be remembered by the protective Detail as the beginning of the management race, the Secret Service vs. the President of the United States, generally a contest of ego against cajolery.

The first chief that Ryan found was talking into a handheld radio and trying to direct his firefighters closer into the flames. A person in civilian clothes was close by, holding a large paper roll flat on the car's hood. Probably plans of the building, Jack thought. Ryan waited a few feet away, while the two men moved hands left and right over the plans and the chief spoke staccato instructions into his radio.

"And, for Christ's sake, be careful with all those loose stones," Chief Paul Magill finished his last command. Then he turned around and rubbed his eyes. "Who the hell are you?"

"This is the President," Price informed him.

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Magill's eyes blinked. He took a quick look at the people with guns, then back at Ryan. "This is pretty damned bad," the chief said first.

"Anyone get out?"

Magill shook his head. "Not from this side. Three people on the other side, all beat up. We think they were in the Speaker's cloak room, someplace around there, probably the explosion just shot them through the windows. Two pages and a Secret Service guy, all burned and busted up. We're conducting a search -- well, we're trying to, but so far even the people who weren't roasted -- they had the oxygen sucked right out of them, asphyxia, you're just as dead." Paul Magill was Ryan's height, but a barrel-chested black man. His hands were mottled with large pale areas that gave testament to a very intimate battle with fire sometime in his professional past. His rugged face showed only sadness now, for fire wasn't a human enemy, just a mindless thing that scarred the fortunate and killed the rest. "We might get lucky. Some people in small rooms, doors closed, like that, sir. There's a million damned rooms in this place, 'cording to these here plans. We might get a couple people out alive. I seen it happen before. But most of 'em . . ." Magill just shook his head for a moment. "The line's holding, ought not to spread much more."

"Nobody from the chamber?" Agent Raman asked. He really wanted to know the name of the agent who'd been blown clear, but it

would not have been professional to ask. Magill just shook his head in any case.

"No." He stared off at the diminishing glow, and added, "It would have been real quick." Magill shook his head again.

"I want to see," Jack said impulsively.

"No," Magill replied at once. "Too dangerous. Sir, it's my fire, and my rules, okay?"

"I have to see," Ryan said, more quietly. The two pairs of eyes met and communicated. Magill still didn't like it. He saw the people with guns again, and decided, wrongly, that they would support this new President, if that's what he was. Magill hadn't been watching TV when the call had come.

"Ain't gonna be pretty, sir."

IT WAS JUST after sundown in Hawaii. Rear Admiral Robert Jackson was landing at Barbers Point Naval Air Station. His peripheral vision took note of the well-lit hotels on Oahu's south shore, and a passing thought wondered what it cost to stay in one of them now. He hadn't done it since his early twenties, when two or three naval aviators would share accommodations in order to save money for hitting the bars and impressing the local women with their worldly panache. His Tomcat touched down gently, despite the lengthy ride and three aerial refuelings, because Robby still thought of himself as a fighter pilot, and therefore an artist of sorts. The fighter slowed down properly during its run-out, then turned right onto the taxiway.

"Tomcat Five-Zero-Zero, continue down to the end--"

"I've been here before, miss," Jackson replied with a smile, breaking the rules. But he was an admiral, wasn't he? Fighter pilot and admiral. Who cared about rules?

"Five-Zero-Zero, there's a car waiting."

"Thank you." Robby could see it, there by the farthest hangar, along with a sailor waving the usual lighted wands.

"Not bad for an old guy," the backseater noted as he folded up his maps and other unnecessary but gravely important papers.

"Your vote of approval is noted." / was never this stiff before, Jackson admitted to himself. He shifted himself in the