

Emily Bestler Books

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CODE OF CONDUCT

by

BRAD THOR

Read on for the riveting opening of
Brad Thor's pulse-pounding new thriller
Code of Conduct . . .

“If you must break the law, do it to seize power.”

—JULIUS CAESAR

PROLOGUE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

When word leaked that the President had been taken to the Bethesda Naval Hospital for observation, panic set in. If the President of the United States wasn't safe from the virus, no one was.

Scot Harvath swerved around the car in front of him and sped through the intersection as the light changed. The traffic was worsening. Quarantine rumors had sent people rushing to stores to stock up.

"We don't need to do this," the woman sitting next to him said.

What she meant was that *he* didn't need to do this. He could leave, too. He didn't have to stay behind in D.C.

"I've already talked to Jon and his wife," he replied. "You'll be safe there."

"What about you?"

"I'll be okay. I'll join you as soon as I can."

He was lying. It was a white lie, meant to make her feel better, but it was a lie nonetheless. They were already talking about shutting down air traffic. That's why he needed to get her out tonight.

"What if we're overreacting?" she asked.

"We're not."

Lara knew he was right. She had seen the projec-

tions. Even the “best case” numbers were devastating. The cities would be the hardest hit. Hospitals were already at surge capacity, and were being overrun by otherwise healthy people who had convinced themselves they were showing one or more of the virus’s symptoms. It was beginning to make it impossible for real emergencies like heart attacks and breathing problems brought on by severe asthma to be seen. And it was only going to get worse.

Cities, towns, and villages from coast to coast scrambled to figure out how they would continue to deliver essential services, in addition to dealing with the staggering number of bodies if the death toll reached even half of what was being predicted. In a word, they *couldn’t*.

As they succumbed to the virus or stayed home to protect their own families, fewer and fewer first responders would be available. Soon, 911 call centers would go down. After that, water treatment facilities and power plants. Hospitals, pharmacies, and grocery stores would cease operating—the majority of them looted and burned to the ground. Chaos and anarchy would reign.

The only people who might hope to survive were those who had exercised some degree of caution and had prepared in advance. But even then, there was still no guarantee. Riding in the wake of Death and his pale horse was another force that would prove just as devastating—those who planned to take advantage of the chaos.

Suddenly, two blue-and-white Department of Homeland Security Suburbans spun around the corner and came racing toward them, their lights and sirens blaring.

Harvath jerked his wheel hard to the right to get

out of their way. Even then, he came within inches of being hit before the DHS vehicles swerved back into their lane.

Lara turned in her seat as they sped past. “Jesus!” she exclaimed. “Did you see that? They almost hit us.”

The chaos had officially started.

Before he could respond, his cell phone rang. “Good,” he said, after listening to the voice on the other end. “We’re ten minutes away.”

Disconnecting the call, he pressed harder on the accelerator and told her, “The plane just landed. Everything will be ready by the time we get there.”

Nearing the private aviation section of Reagan National, they saw a sea of limousines and black Town Cars. He wasn’t the only one who had seen the writing on the wall. Those who could get out were getting out now.

Not wanting to get tied up in the parking lot, he pulled to the side of the road near the entrance and hopped out to get Lara’s bag.

Opening the rear of his Tahoe, he plugged his combination into one of the drawers of his TruckVault and pulled it open.

“I already have my duty weapon,” Lara said. “Plus my credentials and extra ammo.”

She was always armed. He knew that. Removing a small, hard-sided Pelican Case, he handed it to her. “Just in case,” he said.

Lara popped the latches and flipped open the lid. “Sat phone?” she asked.

Harvath nodded. “If this gets worse, the cell phone network won’t stay up for long.”

“Is my cell even going to work up there?”

“Once you leave Anchorage, you might as well turn

it off until you get to the lodge. There's no cell service there, but you can make calls over their Wi-Fi."

Removing the battery cover, he showed her where he had taped the number for the sat phone he kept in his bug-out bag. If everything failed, the sat phones would be their fallback.

Closing up the Tahoe, he picked up her bag and walked with her to the Signature Flight Support building. Inside, it was pandemonium.

Wealthy families jostled with corporate executives to speed the departure of their jets. There were mountains of luggage and, from what he overheard, a vast array of destinations—Jackson Hole, Eleuthera, Costa Rica, Kauai—likely second or third home locations where they hoped to ride out the storm.

Harvath spotted their copilot, who took Lara's bag and the Pelican Case and walked them out to the jet.

Harvath didn't want a long good-bye. He wanted them in the air as quickly as possible.

Wrapping his arms around her, he kissed her. It felt detached, distant. His mind had already left the airport. It was on to the dangerous assignment that lay in front of him.

"It's still not too late," she said.

It was and she knew it.

"You need to get going," he replied, giving her one more kiss as he broke off their hug.

"See me onto the plane."

It was too loud on the tarmac to hear the chime, but he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Pulling it out, he read the message. Now he really needed to go.

"I can't," he said, kissing her one last time. "Let me know when you get there."

With that, he turned and walked back to the Signature Flight Support building.

As soon as he was inside, he called the person who had texted him. "Are you positive about this?" he asked.

"One hundred percent," the voice on the other end responded.

"How long do I have?"

"Could be hours. Could be days. What are you going to do?"

"What would you do?" Harvath asked.

"Get my affairs in order and hope it's painless."