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About the Authors



ONE

Under the Stage

JUDD gently lowered the guard to the ground, knowing the man had died trying to protect Buck Williams and the others in the Tribulation Force. Footsteps pounded on the stage above them.

Lionel grabbed the guard's walkie-talkie. "Come on, we have to get out of here!"

Judd and Lionel rolled under the stage and held their breath. The radio squawked in Lionel's hand. He turned it down.

Two guards jumped from the stage and felt for a pulse on the downed guard. One barked into his radio, "He's dead, sir."

A voice shot back, "Find the rabbi and those others. I want them dead before they get out of the stadium!"

Judd whispered to Lionel, "We've got to stop them!"

But before Judd could move, another voice blared on the guard's radio. "We've spotted them in a Mercedes a few blocks from the stadium, sir."

"Probably headed to the Rosenzweig estate," another voice said. "After them!"

Judd sighed. "Nothing we can do now."

The stadium was nearly empty. A few stragglers knelt near the stage, praying. Medical personnel attended to the injured.

Judd and Lionel watched from the shadows as GC peacekeepers dragged the dead guard away. A cameraman flipped on a light, and a reporter stepped in front of it. "We are live at Teddy Kollek Stadium," the reporter said. "Just moments ago, this Global Community peacekeeper was murdered at the conference called the Meeting of the Witnesses. Those in the audience listened to a message of love and peace, but it seems someone did not follow their leader's teaching."

"No way one of the witnesses shot that guard," Lionel said.

Judd gritted his teeth. "Carpathia will make Tsion look—"

"What?" Lionel said.

Judd spied a heavysset boy near the front row. "I know that kid," he said.

When the Global Community guards were

gone, Judd and Lionel crept from under the stage and approached the boy.

The boy's mouth dropped open. "Judd," the boy said, "what are you doing here?"

"How do I know you?" Judd said.

"I'm Samuel. Nina and Dan Ben-Judah were my neighbors." Samuel had given Judd the video of the murders of Tsion's family.

"I wondered what happened to you," Judd said. "They took the video you gave me and—"

"We should not stay here," Samuel interrupted. "Come with me."

"We have to find our friend," Lionel said.

"You can find him later," Samuel said.

"The followers of the rabbi are in danger. Come to my house."

Judd told Samuel their things were at the university. Samuel said, "We will go there on the way. Quickly! My father must not see you."

"Why not?" Judd said.

"He is working with the Global Community!"



Vicki ran to the others to tell them about Melinda. Phoenix ran beside her, clearly glad to be free from the rope and tape Melinda

had wrapped around his legs. When Vicki entered, Darrion held up a hand.

"Just a minute," Vicki said, "I need to talk to you all."

"But something terrible's happened!" Darrion said.

Vicki yelled. "Please! Melinda's gone! She tied Phoenix up and left."

Conrad said, "How long ago?"

"I can't tell," Vicki said. "Let's search the house and the woods."

"I'll check the shed for the motorcycle," Conrad said.

"Sorry, Darrion," Vicki said, "but this is important."

Darrion hung her head. "I thought you'd be concerned about Judd and Lionel and Mr. Stein."

"What do you mean?"

"Shots were fired at the stadium."

Vicki put a hand over her mouth. "The GC is shooting at the witnesses?"

Darrion shook. "I'm scared, Vick."

"Judd and Lionel can take care of themselves," Vicki said, hugging Darrion.

The kids found no trace of Melinda in the house. Conrad said, "At least she didn't take the last motorcycle. She has to be on foot."

Vicki looked at her watch. "Plenty of daylight left, but we have to spread out."

Under the Stage

Conrad and Darrion roared off on the motorcycle toward the main road. The others split up on foot. Vicki prayed as she ran into the woods.



GC emergency vehicles stopped traffic as Judd walked with Lionel and Samuel to the university. Lionel turned up the walkie-talkie and heard peacekeepers relaying information.

"They must be checking every car," Judd said.

"The GC are very upset about the rabbi and what he has done," Samuel said.

Judd turned. "Why are you helping us? You're not a follower of Dr. Ben-Judah."

"How do you know?" Samuel said.

Judd glanced at Lionel. "We can tell."

"Nina and Dan were my friends," Samuel said. "I feel terrible about what happened to them. I would not want to see the same thing happen to you."

Hundreds of witnesses gathered outside the gymnasium. A commotion at the front caught Judd's attention. GC guards led a dozen people from the building.

"What's going on?" Judd asked a man nearby.

"They are arresting the local committee," the man said.

Yitzhak Weizmann, the man who had given them shelter before the meetings began, was being led away in handcuffs. Behind him stood other committee members, including the meeting emcee.

The man next to Judd said, "They suspect the group is hiding the rabbi."

Judd gasped. The last man out the door was Mr. Stein. Judd shouted and waved and pushed his way to the front, but a uniformed officer appeared at the door with a bullhorn. "Attention, everyone who was using this gymnasium for shelter!" The officer passed the bullhorn to another man, who repeated his statement in several different languages.

"This is a crime scene," the man continued. "We have your belongings, and we will keep them until this situation is resolved."

"Mr. Stein's money!" Lionel whispered. "That's the only way we're getting home."

"Form a single line to register for your belongings," the officer said.

People lined up, but Samuel pulled Judd and Lionel away. "Do not give them your names. Come with me."

"We have to help Mr. Stein," Judd said.

"I can help you get him out," Samuel said, "but you must come with me."

Under the Stage

Judd and Lionel followed Samuel back into the traffic near the stadium. They got in a cab, but the driver yelled at Samuel in Hebrew, and the three retreated.

"What did he say?" Judd said.

"He cursed at us," Samuel said. "Because of the traffic, he cannot move."

They walked through the congested streets. "You have heard about the meeting at the Wailing Wall tomorrow?" Samuel said.

"We'll be there," Judd said.

"Don't," Samuel said. "The GC are planning to execute Dr. Ben-Judah."

"Carpathia promised he wasn't going to hurt anybody," Lionel said.

"They're going to make it look like a terrorist attack," Samuel said.

"You know this because of your father?" Judd said.

Samuel nodded.

"Why did he let you go to that meeting?" Lionel said.

"He didn't know," Samuel said. "I came on my own."

They passed a crowded bar, and a photo of the guard Judd had met flashed on a big-screen television inside. Beneath his photo were the years of his birth and death.

"Wish I could hear this," Judd said.

"We're not far from my house," Samuel said. "We can watch there."

Lionel pulled Judd aside. "His father's working with the GC!"

"He trusted me with the videotape. He's okay. He wants to help."

"But he doesn't have the mark."

"Maybe we can change that," Judd said.



Conrad and Darrion returned and met Vicki and the others near the shed to discover that still no one had seen Melinda.

"I say we head toward town," Darrion said.

Vicki's weird friend Charlie walked up.

"What are you guys going to do with her after you catch her?"

Vicki looked at the others and shrugged.

"Drag her back here?"

Conrad scratched his chin. "I don't care. I just want to find her."

"Maybe she doesn't want to rat us out," Vicki said. "Maybe she just wants to get away."

Shelly agreed. "Tsion's message could have been too much for her. She might just need time."

"And she might run into the GC," Conrad

said, "which would be the end for her. Let me at least stay on the road awhile."



Judd and Lionel crept to the back door of Samuel's house and followed him in. Emergency vehicles screamed by, sirens blaring. Samuel answered the ringing phone. "My father," he mouthed.

"Did he tell you what's happening?" Judd said as Samuel hung up.

"He told me to stay inside. The crazy zealots are killing people."

Samuel turned on the television, and the photo of the guard flashed on the screen again. Another photo appeared beside the guard.

"It's Buck!" Lionel shouted.

The news anchor looked grim. "Global Community forces believe this videotape reveals this man as the murderer at Teddy Kollek Stadium. The suspect has been identified as American Cameron Williams, former employee of the GC publishing division. Williams is reportedly staying with Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah at the home of Israeli Nobel Prize-winner Dr. Chaim Rosenzweig."

Lionel's radio squawked. "Proceeding to the Rosenzweig estate," a man said.

"That is only a few blocks from here," Samuel said.

Leon Fortunato, Nicolae Carpathia's right-hand man, appeared on the screen at a news conference. "We will do what we must to bring these criminals to justice. We have witnesses to the act, a videotape recording, and several of the local committee members in custody. Rest assured, we will bring to justice the man or woman who did this."

"Buck was running away when the guard was shot," Lionel said. "The videotape has to show that."

"The truth never stops these people," Judd said.

Samuel brought snacks, and Judd and Lionel ate as they watched the news and monitored the guard's radio.

"Has your dad always worked for the GC?" Lionel said.

Samuel shook his head. "Only since the murder of Dr. Ben-Judah's family. My father had helped them in the past, but that changed when the rabbi abandoned his faith. My father went totally for the Global Community and Nicolae Carpathia. He works—"

A roar went over the house. Judd ran to the window and saw a brilliant flash.

"A GC chopper," Samuel said.

Under the Stage

"Closing in on Buck and Tsion, I bet," Judd said. "We have to help."

"You can't go there," Samuel said.

"These are our friends," Judd said. "We might be able to do something."

Samuel told them how to find the Rosenzweig estate, then turned on a light at the rear of the house. "If this light is off when you return, tap on my window and I'll let you in."

The night air was cool and the streets almost deserted. Judd and Lionel rounded a corner and saw two squad cars parked in front of a huge gate. They could hear the chopper nearby.

Lionel listened to the banter of the GC peacekeepers on the walkie-talkie. Chaim Rosenzweig wasn't letting them inside.

The chopper hovered over the estate, then put down on top of the house.

"They're going in through the roof," Lionel said.

Judd peered through the darkness at the GC insignia on the side of the chopper. Three figures leaped into the helicopter just before it lifted off and headed north, a few feet above the rooftops.

Another chopper approached from the south and hovered directly over them. The

frantic voice of the pilot came over the radio, trying to communicate with the other chopper.

"Tision and Buck have to be in the first chopper," Judd said.

"Who else was with them?" Lionel said. "Chloe?"

Judd shrugged. "Let's head back to Samuel's house before they spot us."

Just after 1 A.M. Judd and Lionel found the light off. Judd tapped lightly on Samuel's window. A light came on over the door. Judd and Lionel climbed the steps and waited.

Something moved behind them.

Samuel opened the door and smiled. "I knew it! I told you they'd come back!"

Judd turned. A man stood behind them, holding a gun. "Good work, Son."