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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| What's Gone On Before. | ix |
| 1. The Storming Horsemen | 1 |
| 2. Lionel's Encounter | 13 |
| 3. The Sleeping Enemy | 27 |
| 4. Deadly Plans | 37 |
| 5. Vicki's Surprise | 49 |
| 6. The Hoax | 61 |
| 7. Answered Prayer | 73 |
| 8. The Ambassador | 85 |
| 9. On the Air | 97 |
| 10. Live! | 109 |
| 11. Carl's Dilemma | 121 |
| 12. Saying Good-Bye | 133 |
| About the Authors | |



ONE

The Storming Horsemen

AS THE crowd in the arena wildly applauded, three uniformed men approached Vicki Byrne. One said something into a radio as Vicki concentrated on the screen. She had hoped she was wrong, but it was true. The Morale Monitor outside the arena had nabbed her friend Melinda Bentley.

“We believe there are more Ben-Judah followers inside,” the Morale Monitor on the screen said, “and we’re going to conduct a thorough search before this session is over. Right now, let’s go to Houston, Texas, and find out what’s going on there.”

The scene switched to a domed stadium, where it appeared other believers were about to be exposed by the GC plot.

Vicki wanted to help Melinda, but she feared the men beside her. One was a GC

Peacekeeper. The other two were younger and wore Morale Monitor uniforms.

Vicki scanned the crowd for a familiar face or someone with the mark of the believer. The auditorium was built in a circle and used for everything from sporting events to rock concerts. She saw no one she recognized. Suddenly, the Peacekeeper grabbed Vicki's arm. "Come with us."

"What did I do?"

Kids nearby turned and shushed them, then stopped when they saw the Peacekeeper.

The man leaned close. "You were running from one of our Morale Monitors. You know the girl we have in custody. Now come quietly or we'll disable you." The man flashed a stun gun.

"Let me get my purse," she said.

The man let go of her for an instant, just long enough for Vicki to break free. She rushed down the row, climbing over legs, stumbling as she stepped on people's shoes.

"We've got a runner!" the man yelled into his radio.

Someone in the crowd shouted, "She's one of the Judah-ites!"

Vicki made it to the end of the row and headed down the steps. Another Morale Monitor came toward her so she turned and

The Storming Horsemen

headed for the top. Seconds later, another boy in uniform descended toward her.

Vicki spotted a railing and darted into the crowd. Some scooted out of her way while others tried to grab her. She fought to the railing and looked over the side. Too far down. As the men converged on her, she swung her legs over the side and eased down. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes as she prepared to let go.

But a boy grabbed her arm. His T-shirt sported the face of Nicolae Carpathia and the words *The Hope of the World*. "I got her! Help!" he yelled.

Vicki let go of the railing and lunged at the boy with her free hand. She missed, but the boy let go and Vicki fell toward the concrete.



Judd Thompson Jr. knew from reading Tsion Ben-Judah's letters to other believers that the horsemen would kill many more people. Tsion had written that as the world came closer to the forty-second month into the Tribulation, the death toll from the 200 million horsemen would reach a third of the population.

Judd ran back to the patio and joined his friends. He had seen the angry horses before,

but never this many. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands stampeded the old city of Jerusalem. The horses had the heads of lions, and fire and smoke poured from their nostrils and mouths. The riders wore gleaming breastplates. Flashes of color nearly blinded Judd, and he had to turn away.

The enormous beasts made no sound as they galloped. It was like a horror movie with the sound muted, but this was scarier than anything Judd had ever seen.

He counted nine people on the street, all unaware of the angels of death ready to strike down anyone God would let them. The people coughed and choked as the smoke billowed around them. All nine fell to their knees and grabbed their throats. One man pulled his shirt over his head in an attempt to block the suffocating smoke. Three collapsed into the gutter and lay motionless.

Mr. Stein knelt and closed his eyes. "I have never seen anything so horrible."

The army of horsemen and their animals kept coming, storming the city in search of more victims. Judd shook his head.

Lionel leaned close. "This makes all the other attacks look like picnics."

"You think this is happening to the kids back in Illinois?"

The Storming Horsemen

Lionel frowned. "From what I'm reading off the Internet, this is happening everywhere."



Vicki tried to land on her feet, but she fell backward and smacked the concrete floor, stunning her. When her head hit, it almost knocked her out, but she somehow managed to struggle to her feet. Her legs weren't cooperating, but she realized she hadn't broken or sprained anything. Kids leaned over the railing, pointing and shouting. Two Morale Monitors sprinted down the steps.

Vicki lurched into another hallway and staggered around a corner. She rammed into someone full force, and they both went down.

It was Mark. "Keep going," he said, helping her back up. "I'll stall them."

Vicki raced on, hearing him yell something at the Morale Monitors. As she neared a concession area, she heard footsteps and ducked into a rest room.



Mark Eisman waited until the Morale Monitors were nearly through the tunnel when he stepped out and collided with one of them. "Are you looking for that girl?"

"Yeah, which way?" the Morale Monitor said.

Mark pointed away from Vicki. They turned down the hall, talking into their radios as they ran. Mark looked for Vicki, but she was gone.

He went back inside the arena and noticed a flurry of activity in the stands. Morale Monitors and GC Peacekeepers were searching the stands. A local announcer interrupted the live GC feed on the screen and asked for the cooperation of the crowd. The man described Vicki and asked anyone who saw her to report to the nearest Morale Monitor.

"This girl is a Judah-ite," the man said, "and is dangerous. There is a reward for anyone who helps us arrest her or any other Judah-ite."

The crowd seemed energized. Many looked around while others got up and moved toward the nearest exits.

Suddenly, Mark noticed something strange on the huge video screen. People in Texas were panicking, many running from the domed stadium. The picture switched to a civic center in Memphis, where kids were also running from their seats in terror.

Mark shook his head. Only one thing could scare people that bad.



Vicki found the last stall in the bathroom empty. She quickly swung the door shut behind her and locked it. She took a moment to catch her breath, then looked underneath the stalls. She was alone.

Vicki had to get out of the building without the GC seeing her, but how? Mark or Darrion or Shelly could help, but with thousands of kids in the arena, finding them seemed impossible.

The rest-room door burst open. Vicki held her breath, her heart beating furiously. She sat and raised her feet off the floor. Someone kicked in the first stall door, then the next.

The intruder kicked Vicki's stall door, and when it didn't open jiggled the lock. Vicki saw the standard GC-issue black boots under the door.

She scooted as far back as she could but soon heard what she dreaded. "Global Community Morale Monitor! Unlock this door!"

Vicki opened the stall and a female Morale Monitor stepped inside, closed the door, and locked it.

"You're a Judah-ite," the girl said, "the one we're looking for?"

Vicki studied the girl's face under her uniform cap as footsteps sounded outside.

"Natalie?" someone shouted from the hall.

"In the bathroom!" the girl said.

"Find anything?"

"Nobody," Natalie said. "Had to make a pit stop."

"Get out here. We need your help."

"Why did you do that?" Vicki whispered.

Natalie pushed back her hat, and Vicki saw the mark of the believer. Vicki shuddered. "I thought I was caught."

"You will be if you don't get out of here fast," Natalie said.

"Wait. How did you become a believer?"

"Long story," Natalie said. "No time now."

"The girl being held outside is my friend. We need to help her."

"They've probably already put her in the van. There's no way . . ."

Natalie's voice trailed as screams came from the hallway. Now panicked voices, shouting, and hundreds of kids running.

"Stay here," Natalie said and left.

Moments later she returned. "You're not going to believe this. Come on."

"But they'll see—"

Natalie shook her head. "You're the least of their worries now."

The two made their way through the fright-

The Storming Horsemen

ened crowd to the outer ring of the arena. There, Vicki looked through huge windows at a sight she would never forget. Bearing down on them were thousands upon thousands of horses and riders. Hundreds of kids streamed through the smoke- and sulfur-filled hallways, knocking each other down, trampling, coughing, gasping for air, and covering their mouths.

"This is the first I've seen of these things," Natalie whispered. "I read Dr. Ben-Judah's descriptions, but this is worse than I imagined."

Vicki quickly told of her encounter with the horsemen at the schoolhouse. "Remember, the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world."

Natalie nodded. "But what's going to happen to all these people?"

Kids were desperately trying to get outside, but those already out were scrambling to get back inside. "A lot of people are going to die today."

A Morale Monitor raced through the crowd toward Natalie. He raised his gun and fired at the huge window behind them. Glass crashed in the hallway, spreading everywhere. Before Natalie could stop him, the boy jumped through the window and fell to certain death.

UPLINK FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Natalie handed Vicki a small key. "Find your friend. This will open the handcuffs."

Vicki gave the girl the address of the kid's Web site, www.theunderground-online.com. "If they discover you or if you want a safe place to stay, write us."

Vicki pushed through the crowd. Kids huddled in corners, screaming and crying. Others had already been trampled to death, their crumpled bodies strewn in the hall like rag dolls. Vicki stepped over bodies, stopping to check for a pulse here and there, soon realizing there was no point.

She spotted the GC truck that had been used for the satellite uplink. A microphone lay on the pavement. The Morale Monitor who had caught Melinda was gone. Mark and Shelly ran up and hugged Vicki. Darrion followed a few moments later.

"I thought they had you," Shelly said.

"Let's get Melinda," Vicki said.

As they walked across the plaza toward the truck, Vicki had to focus. Horses with lions' heads galloped overhead and angry riders bore down on the frightened crowds. Vicki knew she wasn't in danger, but walking close to the thundering herd of demonic beasts was still scary.

Vicki picked up the dented microphone. The truck door was closed, but through a

The Storming Horsemen

small window she saw an incredible display of video monitors and a huge mixing console. Shelly gave a whoop from the front of the truck, and Vicki and Mark came running.

In the driver's seat sat the Morale Monitor who had shown Melinda on the worldwide satellite feed. Her eyes were open, but she had stopped breathing. Beside her sat Melinda, handcuffed to the passenger-side door handle.

Vicki used the key and quickly freed Melinda. "Let's get out of here."

A huge explosion rocked the plaza. The kids huddled behind the truck and watched the arena fill with flames. Kids scrambled to get out of the way. Some were caught in the blast and killed instantly. Others were trapped inside.

"We have to help them!" Mark yelled over the noise. He ran to the front of the building. Kids screamed and pounded on a huge window, trying to get out. Vicki picked up a heavy rock and threw it as hard as she could, but it didn't even crack the glass.

"Too thick!" Mark said. "I'll be right back." He ran from the area, fumbling in his pocket for something.

Vicki and the others helped as many kids as they could. Some coughed and wheezed, trying to breathe. Others lay motionless.

Moments later Mark raced up in their car. He honked the horn and yelled, "Tell them to move back from the window!"

Vicki motioned for the kids to move back as Mark revved the engine and hurtled toward the building. The crash sent glass flying as kids streamed out, pushing and shoving.

When they had done all they could do, Mark inspected the car. "Flat tire. I'll change it before we head back."

Vicki looked at Melinda. "How did you get here from the schoolhouse?"

"Walked to the main road and hitched a ride."

Vicki frowned. "No way all five of us are getting in this little car."

Mark touched Vicki's shoulder. "I have an idea."