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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What's Gone On Before.	xi
1. Death in Tel Aviv	1
2. Z-Van's Revenge	13
3. Sabir's Story	25
4. Chang's Good News	39
5. The Enemy's Plans	51
6. Finding Josey	65
7. Fogarty's Dilemma	77
8. Tom's Decision	89
9. The Gathering Storm	101
10. Carpathia's Triumphant Entry	113
11. Nicolae's Claim	125
12. Murder in the Holy Place.	135

About the Authors



ONE

Death in Tel Aviv

JUDD Thompson Jr. closed his eyes as a plume of smoke rose from the aircraft wreckage less than a mile away. The jet had slammed into the beach at hundreds of miles an hour, followed by a deafening explosion. Judd's ears still rang as he knelt on the beach.

Judd's friend, Mac McCullum, was piloting the plane. Judd tried to imagine the horror of those last few seconds. Chang Wong had told Judd that Mac and a few other believers who worked inside the Global Community were trying to escape. Why hadn't Mac pulled the plane out of the plunge to earth?

A siren sounded from emergency vehicles in the distance, but everyone knew they could send a thousand ambulances to the crater and it wouldn't make any difference. Lionel Washington put a hand on Judd's shoulder.

MURDER IN THE HOLY PLACE

People near Judd and Lionel, as well as those who surrounded the platform, fell silent. Angry black-and-orange flames billowed from the crash site as the blaze melted the Quasi Two.

A man several feet from them turned to his wife. "I hope they have a record of passengers on that plane. They'll never find any bodies."

The man's wife covered her face. "This was supposed to be such a happy day for the potentate."

Judd looked at Lionel. "The way that thing came down, you think it was sabotage?"

"What do you mean?"

"If somebody found out about Mac and the others, the GC could have made it crash."

Lionel shook his head. "With all these people around? Plus, the plane had equipment for the mark application. They wouldn't have destroyed their own machines."

The eerie silence continued until a woman cried out, "Save them, Potentate!"

Z-Van, the singer Judd and Lionel were traveling with, stood at the back of a group of dignitaries. He leaned forward and spoke to a man in front of him as Nicolae walked to the microphone.

Carpathia held up a hand and tried to soothe the masses with his voice. "Peace be

unto you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives."

Lionel gritted his teeth. "He's ripping off Jesus again."

"Would you please quietly make your way from this place, honoring it as the sacred place of the end for four brave employees. I will ask that the loyalty mark application site be appropriately relocated, and thank you for your reverence during this tragedy."

Z-Van stepped forward, then was ushered off the stage, along with the regional potentates. Leon Fortunato, now the Most High Reverend Father of Carpathianism, stepped to the mike and spread his hands wide. The folds of his robed arms looked like great wings.

"He looks like the most high turkey," Lionel whispered.

Fortunato tried to speak comfortingly to the audience as Carpathia had done, but his voice didn't have the same tone. "Beloved," he said, "while this sadly preempts and concludes today's activities in Tel Aviv, tomorrow's agenda shall remain in place. We look forward to your presence in Jerusalem."

The crowd scattered, some hurrying to automobiles and others standing by the motorcade to get one more look at Carpathia. Bodyguards and officials flanked the man.

Judd and Lionel wandered along the beach to the crash site. The heat from the twisted metal was intense. Global Community security forces had already cordoned off the site with yellow tape. A few people passed, shaking their heads. Some took pictures.

One woman, overcome, laid a bouquet of flowers on the sand. She looked at a friend, wiped away a tear, and said, "They gave their lives in service to the potentate. Those four were heroes."

Judd turned to Lionel as the woman walked away. "Let's get back to Z-Van's plane. I want to call Chang and see if he knows anything about this."



Vicki Byrne rubbed her eyes and looked out at the dark sky. It was early morning in Iowa, and several kids were still awake discussing their next move. Mark and the others agreed that Cheryl Tifanne should accompany them to Wisconsin, but Vicki wanted to go immediately. Colin Dial arrived from one of the other safe houses and joined the discussion.

In the middle of the argument, Mark took a call from Jim Dekker, a believer working inside the Global Community. Mark turned on the speakerphone, and Jim updated them

about what had happened since they last talked.

Jim said he was still at the satellite tracking center, searching for any information he could find about Pete. "I know the GC has impounded the van, but I haven't heard anything about Pete. I also know this Commander Fulcire of RAP is in Iowa."

"RAP?" Shelly said.

"The Rebel Apprehension Program," Jim said. "The United North American States have pledged to lead the world in cracking down on anti-Carpathia activity."

"Then they're mostly after believers," Vicki said.

Mark looked at Colin. "Won't they be able to trace your van, the one Pete took?"

Colin shook his head. "We altered the vehicle identification number and assigned it to the GC fleet. I'll call Becky and have her be on alert just in case."

"What about you?" Vicki said. "Why aren't you out of there?"

"I'm not leaving until I know there's nothing I can do to help Pete," Jim said. "There are rumors about us being required to take the mark later today. I want to be out before then."

Vicki asked if Jim knew anything about

Claudia Zander. He didn't but said he would check. When a new report flashed on GCNN, Jim said he would call back soon and hung up.

A news reporter, April Wojekowski, stood on a dark road in Iowa, lights of squad cars flashing behind her. "GCNN has learned of a search for anti-Carpathia forces here in Iowa. We were allowed to fly in with Commander Kruno Fulcire, who wouldn't comment on a possible escape of prisoners at a nearby GC holding facility. But the commander was optimistic that an abandoned van discovered at the side of this road may yield more clues about a possible rebel conspiracy."

Natalie Bishop's picture appeared on the screen and Vicki gasped. Natalie had been accused of helping rebels by using a superior's computer.

The scene switched to April's recorded interview of Commander Fulcire on his plane. "Are there others inside the Global Community who may be helping the rebels?"

Commander Fulcire frowned. "We hope not. That's why we're administering the mark of loyalty as soon as possible to all United North American employees."

"What new measures will you take to capture anti-Carpathia forces?"

Before Fulcire could answer, GCNN

switched live to April again, her hair swirling wildly below a hovering helicopter. She screamed into the microphone to be heard. "We have some activity now in the brush, a few yards from where they discovered the van."

The camera swung to the right, past the television truck, and focused on about a dozen Global Community officers walking through tall brush by the roadside.

"What do you think they found?" Shelly said.

"I just hope it's not Pete," Vicki said.



Judd and Lionel made their way through the lingering crowd in Tel Aviv. Judd had heard there would be as many as 100,000 GC troops brought into Israel, and he did notice more Morale Monitors and Peacekeepers patrolling the streets. Some rode in Jeeps and covered personnel vehicles. Others walked with guns slung over their shoulders. Judd wondered if Carpathia hoped to scare everyone in Israel into following him. If so, Nicolae had greatly misjudged followers of God.

People along the street spoke sadly about the plane crash. Some called it a shame, while

others blamed Tsion Ben-Judah. "Some say the thing exploded before it even hit the ground," one man said. "I'll bet the Judah-ites planted a bomb and had it explode over Tel Aviv just to make the potentate look bad."

Some young people sat on sidewalks, dressed in shirts and hats that bore images of The Four Horsemen. They were almost as dejected as Z-Van that his appearance had been cancelled.

Westin Jakes, Z-Van's pilot, came down the stairs of the airplane when Judd and Lionel finally made it to the airport. Westin had become a believer soon after Nicolae Carpathia's rise from the dead.

"I don't mean to spoil the party," Westin said, "but I don't advise you guys riding with us. It's not a pretty sight back there."

"What's wrong?" Lionel said.

No sooner had Lionel spoken than a guitar flew out the open door, spinning down the stairs, and smashing onto the tarmac. Z-Van screamed and cursed at someone inside.

"Who's he mad at?" Lionel said.

"Everybody," Westin said. "Join me in the cockpit."

Judd and Lionel quickly ran up the steps and slipped into the cockpit.

Z-Van screamed from the back of the plane, "We had the potentate right there! We

were all ready, and because of this airplane foul-up, we have to reschedule!"

Someone spoke softly and Z-Van screamed again. "I swear, Lars, if you film any of this I'll throw the camera twice as far as I threw the guitar."

"That film guy still following Z-Van around?" Lionel whispered.

Westin nodded. "They were set to shoot the songs at the platform, but the plane crash wiped their schedule."

Judd fumed. "I can't believe he's more concerned about singing his new songs than he is about the people killed in the crash."

Westin cocked his head. "That's my boss."

Westin turned on a tiny monitor and tuned in the GCNN station in Tel Aviv. They had been showing the live broadcast of the festivities up to the crash of the plane. Two grim-faced anchors played amateur video that showed the best moments of the fatal flight.

Westin scowled. "The way that thing came down tells me there was a major problem."

"What do you mean?" Judd said.

"You have all those acrobatic moves, all the fancy flyovers, and then everything goes blank. The pilot doesn't even try to pull out."

"Maybe he couldn't," Judd said.

A photo of Mac McCullum flashed on the

screen. The news anchor said, "We now have confirmed those members of the flight crew and the two passengers. Captain Mac McCullum was said to be one of the Global Community's most experienced pilots, the person who usually flew Potentate Carpathia's plane, the Phoenix 216. He is presumed dead, along with copilot Abdullah Smith, a former Jordanian fighter pilot and first officer for the Global Community."

The news anchor paused. "We should be reminded that there are perhaps family members of these victims who are just now finding out about their loved ones' deaths, and for that we apologize.

"Also among the dead, this woman, Hannah Palemoon. Originally from the United North American States, she was a nurse by profession, so one can assume she may have been on the flight to help administer the mark of loyalty here in Tel Aviv.

"Perhaps the most shocking casualty was a director in Potentate Carpathia's cabinet, David Hassid. We understand he was one of the technical geniuses who helped behind the scenes in New Babylon. I'm sure His Excellency will miss the input of these colleagues, and again, our hearts go out to those who are family members and those who knew the deceased."

Z-Van threw open the cockpit door and rushed inside. "Get me back to Jerusalem!" He eyed Judd and Lionel and cursed again. "And get these two off my plane."

Westin started his preflight procedures and said, "Sir, we promised them—"

"I don't care what you or I or anybody else promised. I want them off and I don't want them back on. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Westin said.



Vicki and the others sat engrossed in the GCNN coverage of the situation in Iowa. Periodically the news switched to Israel to report on the plane crash that had taken four lives. Vicki whimpered when Mac McCullum's picture appeared. The kids knew Mac was a member of the Tribulation Force.

The phone rang and Mark picked up as the kids continued to monitor the news. His eyes darted around the room. When he hung up he looked at Vicki. "If we're getting out of here, we should do it now. Jim said the GC is converging. He sent an urgent message that a small convoy was fleeing south toward Kansas City. He thinks that'll give us enough time to get on the road back to Wisconsin."

"Is he getting out?" Vicki said.

"As soon as he knows we're safe," Mark said.

"Let's go," Colin Dial said, grabbing a few of their belongings.

"Wait," Shelly said. "The van's gone."

"Take my family's minivan," Chad Harris said from the shadows.

Vicki turned to the young man and smiled. Chad had helped her deal with Natalie's death. She put a hand on his arm. "Thank you for being here when we needed you."

Chad nodded. "I hate to see you go, but you'll always have a place here if you need it." He took Vicki's hand, then hugged her.

Conrad yelled and the kids rushed back to the television. The reporter was excitedly announcing that after an exhaustive search, Global Community authorities had found something about a hundred yards from the road. The camera zoomed into the darkness where two uniformed officers dragged someone through the brush.

"It appears to be a large man," April Wojekowski said.

Vicki put a hand to her mouth as the group approached. Between the two GC officers was her friend Pete.