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Characters in this novel sometimes speak words that are adapted
from various versions of the Bible, including the King James Version
and the New King James Version.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What's Gone On Before	xi
1. Mysterious Message	1
2. Closing In.	13
3. Mark's Run	25
4. Commander Fulcire	35
5. In the Trap	47
6. The Visitor	57
7. The Mission.	69
8. Interrogation	81
9. Eyewitness Report	95
10. The Blade	109
11. Tsion's Message	121
12. The Evil Trio	131
13. Tribulation Christmas	145
14. To Jerusalem	157
15. Rumbling Earth.	171
About the Authors	



What's Gone On Before

JUDD Thompson Jr. and the rest of the Young Tribulation Force are living the adventure of a lifetime. After the GC corners Judd and his friends, darkness falls on New Babylon, causing many Carpathia followers to end their lives. Because of the plague, Judd and other believers can walk into government buildings and even concentration camps and help people escape.

Vicki and Lionel get a chance to fly to Petra and take it. Though it is difficult to say good-bye to their friends in Wisconsin, Vicki is excited about her new life and prays Judd will make it safely from New Babylon.

Judd returns to Petra, but the joyful reunion turns sad as live coverage of Chloe Williams' execution is shown on the Global Community News Network. Everyone is amazed at Chloe's brave attitude as she has one more chance to tell people the truth about God before she dies.

THE ROAD TO WAR

After linking up with their friends in Wisconsin by computer, Vicki and Judd are married in a small ceremony a few days later. Tsion Ben-Judah performs the wedding, and Lionel is Judd's best man.

Join the kids as they begin a new life together and try to survive the final days before the Battle of Armageddon.

Mysterious Message

LIONEL Washington smiled as he sat in front of a computer deep in a cave in Petra. He still couldn't believe that Judd and Vicki were married. He had been with them just after they had first met in Mount Prospect, and he would have never guessed they would wind up together. He replayed video from the ceremony a few days earlier and shook his head. *God worked this out*, he thought.

Chang Wong had set Lionel up with the computer and showed him how to access the Global Community's vast network. With a few clicks of the mouse, Lionel listened in on one of Nicolae Carpathia's secret meetings, or heard what was going on in the control room at the Global Community News Network. Chang had even given him software to control the computer with his voice, but Lionel preferred the old-fashioned way.

THE ROAD TO WAR

Lionel touched the stump of his left arm and counted the months since his accident in Indiana. He wasn't having nightmares as much, but he still found it hard to get to sleep. Sometimes he stayed up all night at the computer, trying to figure out what would happen next on God's timetable.

He had renewed his friendship with Sam Goldberg and Mr. Stein, eating manna and quail with them just about every day. But Lionel had to admit he longed for his friends back in the States. It was strange. He was in the safest place on earth, supernaturally protected by God from Carpathia and his growing armies, but Lionel longed for Wisconsin.

In a way, he felt useless and pitied. When assignments were handed out, Lionel was always given the soft jobs or nothing at all. He wanted to build things or help with chores, but he often found himself back at the computer alone.

As the yellow glow of the rising sun peeked through the opening to the cave, Lionel yawned and stretched. People would gather manna soon. Little kids would run through the camp. He loved playing with them, especially Kenny Williams, but Kenny spent most of his time with Buck now, asking questions about his mother.

Instead of heading for bed, Lionel clicked on the link for the Global Community in the United North American States. Things had gotten worse there in the past few days. The GC seemed to be taking out their frustration about the darkness in New Babylon on those without the mark. Reports of people being dragged from hiding places and executed had increased.

Lionel winced as he pulled up a report from GCNN detailing another raid on what looked like a militia hideout in Minnesota, fifty miles west of the Mississippi River. These people didn't have the mark of the believer or of Carpathia. They were hauled from their underground hiding place and herded onto trucks.

The camera focused on a smiling Commander Kruno Fulcire, head of the Rebel Apprehension Program. "We're very pleased with the level of cooperation from the people of this community," he said.

"How did you know they were here?" a reporter asked.

"We actually had a tip from family members of one of the unmarked. They, of course, will receive the full reward offered to those who help uncover rebels."

"Will there be more arrests and executions in this part of the country?" the reporter said.

Fulcire squinted. "I can't give that information, but we hope to have significant developments in the coming days."

Lionel sat forward and pulled up a map of the region. The site of the arrests wasn't that far from the Avery, Wisconsin, hideout. He quickly sent a warning message to Mark and the others.



Mark Eisman held his head in his hands while several people filed out of the main cabin in Wisconsin. Maggie Carlson put a hand on his shoulder before she left. Others weren't so kind, with mean looks and whispers.

Marshall Jameson paced in front of the computer. "I understand your feelings, Mark. I've wanted to start a rebel radio station to tell people the truth, but some things are too dangerous."

"Why are we so concerned about staying safe?" Mark said. "Isn't it more important to get the message out?"

Conrad Graham slapped his hands on his knees. "If that's your goal, I might go along with you, but you're talking about fighting

the GC. What could you possibly accomplish?"

"You saw what they did to Chloe," Mark said. "If somebody had tried to take those Peacekeepers out before they caught her, she wouldn't have lost her head."

"Reports from the Trib Force say she went outside trying to protect her family and friends," Marshall said. "But a rescue mission would have backfired. They didn't even know where she was."

Conrad stood. "I hate just sitting here as much as you do, but if you go out there, we'll be seeing your face flashed on TV."

"You guys don't need me," Mark said. "We have enough people to staff the Web site twenty-four hours a day with people left over."

"Okay, so what do you want to do?" Marshall said.

"Find those RAP people, Fulcire if I can, and give them a dose of their own medicine." Mark glanced at Conrad, then at Marshall. "If you want to know the truth, I've already packed my stuff."

Colin Dial sat in the corner. He cleared his throat and said, "What if we could find a way to get you closer to the action?" Marshall frowned but Colin held up a hand. "I don't want to see him get into trouble, but if he

could get closer to the main headquarters, south of Chicago, maybe he could do some good before this is all over."

"What was the name of the lady and her son living near Chicago?" Marshall said. "The one Vicki and you guys met at the schoolhouse."

"Lenore?" Conrad said.

"That's right!" Mark said. "She was staying southwest of Chicago, wasn't she?"

"I've got her number on my cell," Conrad said, handing a phone to Mark.

Mark punched the Redial button and waited. He heard a weird noise but no dial tone. "Something's wrong with it."

Mark found Lenore's e-mail address and looked through past messages to Vicki and the group. He quickly wrote her and sent the message.



Vicki awoke to sunshine peeking through the lone window of her and Judd's small dwelling. They couldn't call it a house, but it wasn't a shack either. There was enough room for a nice-sized bed, a cabinet to hold their clothes, a computer desk, and a small table.

Vicki noticed Judd was gone and smiled. There was no question where he was.

She lay back and stretched. Being married was a lot different than she had thought. There had already been disagreements to work through. Her childhood image of “happily ever after” was gone. Marriage was truly a lot of work.

Vicki thought of her friends in Wisconsin. They had seen the ceremony via computer, but it wasn't the same as being there. She would have liked Shelly and Melinda and Janie to be bridesmaids, but that had been out of the question. Life wasn't normal and never would be again. But within a few months Jesus would return. Vicki had lived the past six and a half years yearning for him to come back and set things right. Now she would experience the event with her husband.

Husband, Vicki thought. The word made her shoulders tremble.

There was a slight knock and Judd entered. “Ready for breakfast in bed?”

Vicki chuckled. “Are you going to do this every day until Jesus comes back?”

Judd smiled, set down a pitcher of cool water, and handed her a plate filled with fresh manna. “Wouldn't be a bad job,” he said, sitting cross-legged on the bed. “You sleep okay?”

Vicki nodded. "Though it took a while last night. I kept thinking about lunch today. Have you heard anything from Dr. Ben-Judah?"

"I guess we'll hear something if it's off."

Vicki had figured she would get tired of eating the same food, but each morning the honey wafers tasted great. She recalled advertisements for restaurants that claimed their donuts or croissants melted in your mouth, but the manna literally dissolved on her tongue. It was light, flaky, and tasted good any time of the day. Vicki wondered if God had put extra vitamins in the food to satisfy their hunger.

"You know, we could have made a lot of money if we'd have gotten this recipe before the Tribulation started," Vicki said. "Even people who were overweight when they came here have lost pounds eating this."

"Just shows that God's food is best," Judd said, taking a bite of a wafer. He put the plate down and wiped his hands. "I know you might be tired of hearing this, but you've made me the happiest guy in Petra."

Vicki smiled. "I never get tired of hearing that. But sometimes . . ."

"What?"

"Well, I look at Buck Williams who lost Chloe and Dr. Ben-Judah who lost his wife

and children. I see their pain and almost feel guilty for feeling . . . happy."

"I know what you mean. I met a guy yesterday who lost his brother and dad to the false messiah's vipers. Every day he wakes up knowing they're never coming back."

"I met a woman a few days ago who has family in Jerusalem. She doesn't think they've taken Carpathia's mark, but there's no way to tell. She can't reach them."

"Maybe we can bring this up with Dr. Ben-Judah," Judd said.

They finished breakfast, then took a long walk to the fountain. It was one of Vicki's favorite things to do—walk hand in hand with Judd around the sprawling camp, watching people, looking at the rock formations, meeting new friends. Vicki couldn't imagine being any happier.



Mark rolled his clothes and a small supply of food into his sleeping bag and tied it tightly. He slipped a gun Zeke had left behind into his pocket, but Mark knew there was no way he could overpower the GC. He would have to outsmart them rather than outgun them.

As he moved his things outside, he noticed Charlie standing by the window. The crisp,

fall air was cool, and he could see Charlie's breath. "You want to come inside?"

Charlie nodded and entered, pulling his hooded sweatshirt over his head. He looked at the floor and blinked.

"What's up?" Mark said.

"I heard what you're thinking about doing," Charlie said, pawing at the floor with a foot.

"And?"

"And I wish you'd stay."

"Charlie—"

"But if you won't, I want to go with you."

Mark put a hand on Charlie's shoulder.

"I'm sure I could use the help—but not this time."

"You know the GC are mean people, putting Chloe in that head chopper and all. They won't stop, and if they catch you . . . I think something bad's going to happen."

"Nothing's going to happen to me," Mark said. "I hope we'll all be together at the Glorious Appearing. I want to be standing right next to you when Jesus comes back."

Charlie looked up. "You really think we'll make it to then?"

"I'm planning on it."

Charlie helped carry Mark's things to one of the abandoned cars parked in the woods, then said good-bye.



Lionel stared at the computer screen, trying to figure out what he had found. An e-mail sent from an aide to Kruno Fulcire to the GC supreme commander updated the progress of the raids. Much of it was straightforward, with statistics about the number of prisoners and the execution schedule. But a line at the bottom included numbers and letters that looked like gibberish.

Chang walked in and Lionel stood. "Glad you're here. Take a look at this."

Chang sat and studied the screen. "Good catch. Have you talked to your friends in Avery?"

"I e-mailed them and even made a call, but I can't get through. I saw that GCNN was predicting some kind of satellite interference for the northern part of the States."

Chang shook his head. "No way. They must be jamming that area for some reason. When did you send your e-mail?"

"About forty minutes ago," Lionel said as Chang punched information into the computer.

"Look at this," Chang said. "The GC intercepted your message. It never got to your friends."

"What? How could they—?"

Chang clicked on the e-mail from Kruno Fulcire's aide. He pointed at the bottom of the screen. "See this? It's code for the higher-ups. I think they've finally broken into the Young Trib Force Web site."

"No," Lionel gasped.

"That's not the worst news. Looks like the GC has a location for your friends. If we don't alert them, they're dead."