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THE RISE OF ANTICHRIST



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JERRY B. JENKINS

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*To Beverly and to Dianna*



# PROLOGUE

*What Has Gone Before . . .*

IT HAS BEEN nearly two years since the mass disappearances. In one cataclysmic instant, millions all over the globe had vanished, leaving behind everything but flesh and bone.

Airline pilot Captain Rayford Steele had guided his jumbo jet back to Chicago, along with three hundred terror-filled passengers and crew. The plane had been fully loaded upon takeoff, but suddenly more than one hundred seats were empty, save for clothes, jewelry, eyeglasses, shoes, and socks.

Steele lost his wife and twelve-year-old son in the vanishings. He and his college-age daughter Chloe were left behind.

Cameron “Buck” Williams, senior writer for a weekly



news magazine, had been on Rayford's plane. Like the pilot, he launched a frantic search for the truth.

Rayford, Chloe, and Buck, along with their mentor— young pastor Bruce Barnes—become believers in Christ, calling themselves the Tribulation Force, determined to stand against the new world leader. Nicolae Carpathia of Romania becomes head of the United Nations seemingly overnight. And while he charms much of the world, the Tribulation Force believes Nicolae is Antichrist himself.

Through a bizarre set of circumstances, both Rayford and Buck become employees of Carpathia—Rayford his pilot; Buck, publisher of *Global Community Weekly*. Carpathia knows that Rayford and his new wife, Amanda, are believers, but he remains unaware of Buck's relationship with them or of Buck's faith.

The Tribulation Force schedules a reunion in Chicago. Rayford pilots Global Community Potentate Nicolae Carpathia from New Babylon to Washington, D.C. (with Amanda on board). Aware of an insurrection plot, Carpathia announces conflicting and intricate itineraries to make himself hard to locate. Meanwhile, Rayford took Amanda on *Global Community One* to Chicago for the rendezvous with Buck, Chloe, and Bruce.

They discover that Bruce is in the hospital, but on their way to visit him, global war erupts. American militia factions, under the clandestine leadership of Carpathia-emasculated President Gerald Fitzhugh, had joined forces with the United States of Britain and the former sovereign state of Egypt, now

part of the newly formed Middle Eastern Commonwealth. American East Coast militia forces have attacked Washington, which lies in ruin.

Carpathia, whose hotel was leveled, is spirited away safely. His Global Community forces retaliate by attacking a former Nike base in suburban Chicago, within sight of the hospital where Bruce Barnes was suffering from a deadly virus. An assault on New Babylon is quickly thwarted, and London is attacked by Global Community forces in retaliation for Britain's collusion with the American militia.

During all this, Rayford asks his former boss, Earl Halliday, to fly *Global Community One* to New York, where Rayford had assumed he himself would be asked to rendezvous with Carpathia. But as Global Community forces marshal in New York, Rayford fears he has sent his old friend to his death.

Rayford, Amanda, Buck, and Chloe frantically try to get to the ailing Bruce Barnes at Northwest Community Hospital in Arlington Heights, Illinois, when they hear a live broadcast from the Global Community Potentate:

"Loyal citizens of the Global Community, I come to you today with a broken heart, unable to tell you even from where I speak. For more than a year we have worked to draw this Global Community together under a banner of peace and harmony. Today, unfortunately, we have been reminded again that there are still those among us who would pull us apart.

"It is no secret that I am, always have been, and always will be, a pacifist. I do not believe in war. I do not believe

in weaponry. I do not believe in bloodshed. On the other hand, I feel responsible for you, my brother or my sister in this global village.

“Global Community peacekeeping forces have already crushed the resistance. The death of innocent civilians weighs heavy on me, but I pledge immediate judgment upon all enemies of peace. The beautiful capital of the United States of North America has been laid waste, and you will hear stories of more destruction and death. Our goal remains peace and reconstruction. I will be back at the secure headquarters in New Babylon in due time and will communicate with you frequently.

“Above all, do not fear. Live in confidence that no threat to global tranquility will be tolerated, and no enemy of peace will survive.”



As Rayford looked for a route that would get him near Northwest Community Hospital, the Cable News Network/Global Community Network correspondent came back on. “This late word: Anti-Global Community militia forces have threatened nuclear war on New York City, primarily Kennedy International Airport. Civilians are fleeing the area and causing one of the worst pedestrian and auto traffic jams in that city’s history. Peacekeeping forces say they have the ability and technology to intercept missiles but are worried about residual damage to outlying areas.

“And this now from London: A one-hundred-megaton bomb has destroyed Heathrow Airport and radiation fallout threatens the populace for miles. The bomb was apparently dropped by peacekeeping forces after contraband Egyptian and British fighter-bombers were discovered rallying from a closed military airstrip near Heathrow. The warships, which have all been shot from the sky, were reportedly nuclear-equipped and en route to Baghdad and New Babylon.”

“It’s the end of the world,” Chloe whispered. “God help us.”

Rayford remained desperate to check on Bruce in the hospital. A passerby told him Northwest Community was “through that field and over the rise. But I don’t know how close they’ll let you get to what’s left of it.”

“It was hit?”

“Was it hit? Mister, it’s just up the road and across the street from the old Nike base. Most people think it got hit first.”

Rayford’s heart sank as he walked alone over the rise and saw the hospital. It was mostly rubble.

“Halt!” a guard called out. “This is a restricted area!”

“I have clearance!” Rayford shouted, waving his ID wallet.

When he got to Rayford, the guard took the wallet and studied it, comparing the photo to Rayford’s face. “Wow! Clearance level 2-A. You work for Carpathia himself?”

Rayford nodded and headed toward what had been the front of the building. Body after body was laid out in a neat

row and covered. "Any survivors?" Rayford asked an emergency medical technician.

"We hear voices," the man said. "But we haven't gotten to anyone in time yet."

"Help or get out of the way," a heavyset woman said as she brushed past Rayford.

"I'm looking for a Bruce Barnes," Rayford said.

The woman checked her clipboard. "Check over there," she said, pointing to six bodies. "Relative?"

"Closer than a brother."

"You want I should check for you?"

Rayford's face contorted and he could hardly speak. "I'd be grateful," he said.

She knelt by the bodies one by one, checking, as a sob rose in Rayford's throat. At the fourth body, she began to lift the sheet when she hesitated and checked the still intact wristband. She looked back at Rayford, and he knew. The tears began to roll. The woman slowly pulled back the sheet, revealing Bruce, eyes open, but otherwise still. Rayford fought for composure, his chest heaving. He reached to close Bruce's eyes, but the woman said, "I can't let you do that. I'll do it."

"Could you check for a pulse?" Rayford managed.

"Oh, sir," she said, deep sympathy in her voice, "they don't bring them out here unless they've been pronounced."

"Please," he whispered, crying openly now. "For me."

And as Rayford stood in the bluster of suburban Chicago's early afternoon, his hands to his face, a stranger placed a thumb and forefinger at the pressure points under his pastor's

jaw. Without looking at Rayford, she took her hand away, replaced the sheet over Bruce Barnes's head, and went back about her business. Rayford's knees buckled, and he knelt on the muddy pavement. Sirens blared in the distance, emergency lights flashed all around him, and his family waited less than half a mile away. It was just him and them now. No teacher. No mentor. Just them.

As he rose and trudged back down the rise with his awful news, Rayford heard the Emergency Broadcast System station from every vehicle he passed. Washington had been obliterated. Heathrow was gone. There had been death in the Egyptian desert and in the skies over London. New York was on alert.

The Red Horse of the Apocalypse was on the rampage.



*"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.*

*"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."*

MATTHEW 24:4-8



# CHAPTER 1

IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES; it was the worst of times.

Rayford Steele's knees ached as he sat behind the wheel of the rented Lincoln. He had dropped to the pavement at the crushing realization of his pastor's death. The physical pain, though it would stay with him for days, would prove minor compared to the mental anguish of having yet again lost one of the dearest people in his life.

Rayford felt Amanda's eyes on him. She laid one comforting hand on his thigh. In the backseat his daughter, Chloe, and her husband, Buck, each had a hand on his shoulder.

*What now?* Rayford wondered. *What do we do without Bruce? Where do we go?*

The Emergency Broadcast System station droned on with



the news of chaos, devastation, destruction, and cell phone failure throughout the world. Unable to speak over the lump in his throat, Rayford busied himself maneuvering his way through the incongruous traffic jams. Why were people out? What did they expect to see? Weren't they afraid of more bombs, or fallout?

"I need to get to the Chicago bureau office," Buck said.

"You can use the car after we get to the church," Rayford managed. "I need to get the word out about Bruce."

Global Community peacekeeping forces supervised local police and emergency relief personnel directing traffic and trying to get people to return to their homes. Rayford relied on his many years in the Chicago area to use back roads and side streets to get around the major thoroughfares, which were hopelessly clogged.

Rayford wondered if he should have taken Buck up on his offer to drive. But Rayford had not wanted to appear weak. He shook his head. *There's no limit to the pilot's ego!* He felt as if he could curl into a ball and cry himself to sleep.

Nearly two years since the vanishing of his wife and son, along with millions of others, Rayford no longer harbored illusions about his life in the twilight of history. He had been devastated. He lived with deep pain and regret. This was so hard. . . .

Rayford knew his life could be even worse. Suppose he had not become a believer in Christ and was still lost forever. Suppose he had not found a new love and was alone. Suppose Chloe had also vanished. Or he had never met Buck. There

was much to be grateful for. Were it not for the physical touch of the other three in that car, Rayford wondered if he would have had the will to go on.

He could hardly imagine not having come to know and love Bruce Barnes. He had learned more and been enlightened and inspired more by Bruce than anyone else he'd ever met. And it wasn't just Bruce's knowledge and teaching that made the difference. It was his passion. Here was a man who immediately and clearly saw that he had missed the greatest truth ever communicated to mankind, and he was not about to repeat the mistake.

"Daddy, those two guards by the overpass seem to be waving at you," Chloe said.

"I'm trying to ignore them," Rayford said. "All these nobodies-trying-to-be-somebodies think they have a better idea about where the traffic should go. If we listen to them, we'll be here for hours. I just want to get to the church."

"He's hollering at you with a bullhorn," Amanda said, and she lowered her window a few inches.

"You in the white Lincoln!" came the booming voice. Rayford quickly turned off the radio. "Are you Rayford Steele?"

"How would they know that?" Buck said.

"Is there any limit to the Global Community intelligence network?" Rayford said, disgusted.

"If you're Rayford Steele," came the voice again, "please pull your vehicle to the shoulder!"

Rayford considered ignoring even that but thought better

of it. There would be no outrunning these people if they knew who he was. But how did they know?

He pulled over.



Buck Williams pulled his hand from Rayford's shoulder and craned his neck to see two uniformed soldiers scampering down the embankment. He had no idea how Global Community forces had tracked down Rayford, but one thing was certain: it would not be good for Buck to be discovered with Carpathia's pilot.

"Ray," he said quickly, "I've got one set of phony IDs in the name of Herb Katz. Tell 'em I'm a pilot friend of yours or something."

"OK," Rayford said, "but my guess is they'll be deferential to me. Obviously, Nicolae is merely trying to reconnect with me."

Buck hoped Rayford was right. It made sense that Carpathia would want to make sure his pilot was all right and could somehow get him back to New Babylon. The two uniforms now stood behind the Lincoln, one speaking into a walkie-talkie, the other on a cell phone. Buck decided to go on the offensive and opened his door.

"Please remain in the vehicle," Walkie-Talkie said.

Buck slumped back into his seat and switched his phony papers with his real ones. Chloe looked terrified. Buck put his arm around her and drew her close. "Carpathia must have

put out an all points bulletin. He knew your dad had to rent a car, so it didn't take long to track him down."

Buck had no idea what the two GC men were doing behind the car. All he knew was that his entire perspective on the next five years had changed in an instant. When global war broke out an hour before, he wondered if he and Chloe would survive the rest of the Tribulation. Now with the news of Bruce's death, Buck wondered if they *wanted* to survive. The prospect of heaven and being with Christ sure seemed better than living in whatever remained of this world, even if Buck had to die to get there.

Walkie-Talkie approached the driver's-side window. Rayford lowered it. "You *are* Rayford Steele, are you not?"

"Depends on who's asking," Rayford said.

"This car, with this license number, was rented at O'Hare by someone claiming to be Rayford Steele. If that's not you, you're in deep trouble."

"Wouldn't you agree," Rayford said, "that regardless who I am, we're all in deep trouble?"

Buck was amused at Rayford's feistiness, in light of the situation.

"Sir, I need to know if you are Rayford Steele."

"I am."

"Can you prove that, sir?"

Rayford appeared as agitated as Buck had ever seen him. "You flag me down and holler at me through a bullhorn and tell me I'm driving Rayford Steele's rental car, and now you want me to prove to you that I'm who you think I am?"

“Sir, you must understand the position I’m in. I have Global Community potentate Carpathia himself patched through to a secure cell phone here. I don’t even know where he’s calling from. If I put someone on the phone and tell the potentate it’s Rayford Steele, it had blamed better be Rayford Steele.”

Buck was grateful that Rayford’s cat-and-mouse game had taken the spotlight off the others in the car, but that didn’t last. Rayford slipped from his breast pocket his ID wallet, and as the GC man studied it, he asked idly, “And the others?”

“Family and friends,” Rayford said. “Let’s not keep the potentate waiting.”

“I’m going to have to ask you to take this call outside the car, sir. You understand the security risks.”

Rayford sighed and left the car. Buck wished Walkie-Talkie would disappear too, but he merely stepped out of Rayford’s way and pointed him toward his partner, the one with the phone. Then he leaned in and spoke to Buck. “Sir, in the event that we transport Captain Steele to a rendezvous point, would you be able to handle the disposition of this vehicle?”

*Do all uniformed people talk this way?* Buck wondered. “Sure.”

Amanda leaned over. “I’m Mrs. Steele,” she said. “Wherever Mr. Steele is going, I’m going.”

“That will be up to the potentate,” the guard said, “and providing there’s room in the chopper.”

“Yes, sir,” Rayford said into the phone, “I’ll see you soon then.”

Rayford handed the cell phone to the second guard. "How will we get to wherever we're supposed to go?"

"A copter should be here momentarily."

Rayford motioned for Amanda to pop the trunk but to stay in the car. As he shouldered both their bags, he leaned in her window and whispered. "Amanda and I have to rendezvous with Carpathia, but he couldn't even tell me where he was or where we would meet. That phone is only so secure. I get the feeling it's not far away, unless they're coptering us to an airfield from which we'll fly somewhere else. Buck, you'd better get this car back to the rental company soon. It'll be too easy to connect you with me otherwise."

Five minutes later Rayford and Amanda were airborne. "Any idea where we're going?" Rayford shouted to one of the Global Community guards.

The guard clapped the chopper pilot on the shoulder and shouted, "Are we at liberty to say where we're going?"

"Glenview!" the pilot hollered.

"Glenview Naval Air Station has been closed for years," Rayford said.

The chopper pilot turned to look at him. "The big runway's still open! The man's there now!"

Amanda leaned close to Rayford. "Carpathia's in Illinois already?"

"He must have been out of Washington before the attack. I thought they might have taken him to one of the bomb shelters at the Pentagon or the National Security Administration,

but his intelligence people must have figured those would be the first places the militia would attack.”



“This reminds me of when we were first married,” Buck said as Chloe snuggled close to him.

“What do you mean ‘when we were first married’? We’re still newlyweds!”

“Shh!” Buck said quickly. “What’re they saying about New York City?”

Chloe turned up the radio. “. . . devastating carnage everywhere here in the heart of Manhattan. Bombed-out buildings, emergency vehicles picking their way through debris, Civil Defense workers pleading with people over loudspeakers to stay underground.”

Buck heard the panic in the reporter’s voice as he continued. “I’m seeking shelter myself now, probably too late to avoid the effects of radiation. No one knows for certain if the warheads were nuclear, but everyone is being urged to take no risks. Damage estimates will be in the billions of dollars. Life as we know it here may never be the same. There’s devastation as far as the eye can see.

“All major transportation centers have been closed if not destroyed. Huge traffic jams have snarled the Lincoln Tunnel, the Triborough Bridge, and every major artery out of New York City. What has been known as the capital of the world looks like the set of a disaster movie. Now back to the Cable News/Global Community News Network in Atlanta.”

“Buck,” Chloe said, “our home. Where will we live?”

Buck didn’t answer. He stared at the traffic and wondered at the billowing clouds of black smoke and intermittent balls of orange flame that seemed to hover directly over Mt. Prospect. It was like Chloe to worry about her home. Buck was less concerned about that. He could live anywhere and seemed to *have* lived everywhere. As long as he had Chloe and shelter, he was all right. But she had made their ridiculously expensive Fifth Avenue penthouse flat her own.

Finally, Buck spoke. “They won’t let anybody back into New York for days, maybe longer. Even our vehicles, if they survived, won’t be available to us.”

“What are we going to do, Buck?”

Buck wished he knew what to say. He usually had an answer. Resourcefulness had been the trademark of his career. Regardless of the obstacle, he had somehow made do in every imaginable situation or venue in the world at one time or another. Now, with his new, young wife beside him, not knowing where she would live or how they would manage, he was at a loss. All he wanted to do was to make sure his father-in-law and Amanda were safe, in spite of the danger of Rayford’s work, and to somehow get to Mt. Prospect to assess what was happening to the people of New Hope Village Church and to inform them of the tragedy that had befallen their beloved pastor.

Buck had never had patience for traffic jams, but this was ridiculous. His jaw tightened and his neck stiffened as his palms squeezed the wheel. The late-model car was a smooth ride,



but inching along in near gridlock made the huge automotive power plant feel like a stallion that wanted to run free.

Suddenly an explosion rocked their car and nearly lifted it off its tires. Buck wouldn't have been surprised had the windows blown in around them. Chloe shrieked and buried her head in Buck's chest. Buck scanned the horizon for what might have caused the concussion. Several cars around them quickly pulled off the road. In the rearview mirror Buck saw a mushroom cloud slowly rise and assumed it was in the neighborhood of O'Hare International Airport, several miles away.

CNN/GCN radio almost immediately reported the blast. "This from Chicago: Our news base there has been taken out by a huge blast. No word yet on whether this was an attack by militia forces or a Global Community retaliatory strike. We have so many reports of warfare, bloodshed, devastation, and death in so many major cities around the globe that it will be impossible for us to keep up with all of it. . . ."

Buck looked quickly behind him and out both side windows. As soon as the car ahead gave him room, he whipped the wheel left and punched the accelerator. Chloe gasped as the car jumped the curb and went down through a culvert and up the other side. Buck drove on a parkway and passed long lines of creeping vehicles.

"What are you doing, Buck?" Chloe said, bracing herself on the dashboard.

"I don't know what I'm doing, babe, but I know one thing I'm not doing: I'm not poking along in a traffic jam while the world goes to hell."



The guard who had flagged down Rayford from the overpass now lugged his and Amanda's baggage out of the helicopter. He led the Steeles, ducking under the whirring blades, across a short tarmac and into a single-story brick building at the edge of a long airstrip. Weeds grew between the cracks in the runway. A small Learjet sat at the end of the strip close to the chopper, but Rayford noticed no one in the cockpit and no exhaust from the engine. "I hope they don't expect me to fly that thing!" he hollered at Amanda as they hurried inside.

"Don't worry about that," their escort said. "The guy who flew it here will get you as far as Dallas and the big plane you'll be flying."

Rayford and Amanda were ushered to garishly colored plastic chairs in a small, shabbily appointed military office, decorated in early Air Force. Rayford sat, gingerly massaging his knees. Amanda paced, stopping only when their escort motioned that she should sit down. "I am free to stand, am I not?" she said.

"Suit yourself. Please wait here a few moments for the potentate."



Buck was waved at, pointed at, and hollered at by traffic cops, and he was honked at and obscenely gestured at

by other motorists. He was not deterred. "Where are you going?" Chloe insisted.

"I need a new car," he said. "Something tells me it's going to be our only chance to survive."

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't you see, Chlo'?" he said. "This war has just broken out. It's not going to end soon. It's going to be impossible to drive a normal vehicle anywhere."

"So what're you gonna do, buy a tank?"

"If it wasn't so conspicuous, I just might."

Buck cut across a huge grassy field, through a parking lot, and beside a sprawling suburban high school. He drove between tennis courts and across soccer and football fields, throwing mud and sod in the air as the big car fishtailed. Radio reports continued from around the world with news of casualties and mayhem while Buck Williams and his bride careened on, speeding through yield signs and sliding around curves. Buck hoped he was somehow pointed in the right direction. He wanted to wind up on Northwest Highway, where a series of car dealerships comprised a ghetto of commercialism.

A last sweeping turn led Buck out of the subdivision, and he saw what his favorite traffic reporter always said was "heavy, slow, stop-and-go" traffic all along Northwest Highway. He was in a mood and in a groove, so he just kept going. Pulling around angry drivers, he rode along a soft shoulder for more than a mile until he came upon those car dealerships. "Bingo!" he said.



Rayford was stunned, and he could tell Amanda was too, at the demeanor of Nicolae Carpathia. The dashing young man, now in his midthirties, had seemingly been thrust to world leadership against his own will overnight. He had gone from being nearly an unknown in the lower house of Romanian government to president of that country, then almost immediately had displaced the secretary-general of the United Nations. After nearly two years of peace and a largely successful campaign to charm the masses following the terror-filled chaos of the global vanishings, Carpathia now faced significant opposition for the first time.

Rayford had not known what to expect from his boss. Would Carpathia be hurt, offended, enraged? He seemed none of the above. Ushered by Leon Fortunato, a sycophant from the New Babylon office, into the long-unused administrative office at the former Glenview Naval Air Station, Carpathia seemed excited, high.

"Captain Steele!" Carpathia exclaimed. "Al—, uh, An—, uh, Mrs. Steele, how good to see you both and to know that you are well!"

"It's Amanda," Amanda said.

"Forgive me, Amanda," Carpathia said, reaching for her hand with both of his. Rayford noticed how slow she was to respond. "In all the excitement, you understand . . ."

*The excitement, Rayford thought. Somehow World War III seems more than excitement.*

Carpathia's eyes were ablaze, and he rubbed his hands together, as if thrilled with what was going on. "Well, people," he said, "we need to get headed home."

Rayford knew Carpathia meant home to New Babylon, home to Hattie Durham, home to Suite 216, the potentate's entire floor of luxuriously appointed offices in the extravagant and sparkling Global Community headquarters. Despite Rayford and Amanda's sprawling, two-story condo within the same four-block complex, neither had ever remotely considered New Babylon home.

Still rubbing his hands as if he could barely contain himself, Carpathia turned to the guard with the walkie-talkie. "What is the latest?"

The uniformed GC officer had a wire plugged in his ear and appeared startled that he had been addressed directly by Carpathia himself. He yanked out the earplug and stammered, "What? I mean, pardon me, Mr. Potentate, sir."

Carpathia leveled his eyes at the man. "What is the news? What is happening?"

"Uh, nothing much different, sir. Lots of activity and destruction in many major cities."

It seemed to Rayford that Carpathia was having trouble manufacturing a look of pain. "Is this activity largely centered in the Midwest and East Coast?" the potentate asked.

The guard nodded. "And some in the South," he added.

"Virtually nothing on the West Coast then," Carpathia said, more a statement than a question. The guard nodded. Rayford wondered if anyone other than those who believed

Carpathia was Antichrist himself would have interpreted Carpathia's look as one of satisfaction, almost glee. "How about Dallas/Ft. Worth?" Carpathia asked.

"DFW suffered a hit," the guard said. "Only one major runway is still open. Nothing's coming in, but lots of planes are heading out of there."

Carpathia glanced at Rayford. "And the military strip nearby, where my pilot was certified on the 777?"

"I believe that's still operational, sir," the guard said.

"All right then, very good," Carpathia said. He turned to Fortunato. "I am certain no one knows our whereabouts, but just in case, what do you have for me?"

The man opened a canvas bag that seemed incongruous to Rayford. Apparently he had gathered Air Force leftovers for a disguise for Carpathia. He produced a cap that didn't match a huge, dress overcoat. Carpathia quickly donned the getup and motioned that the four others in the room should gather around him. "The jet pilot is where?" he asked.

"Waiting just outside the door, per your instructions, sir," Fortunato said.

Carpathia pointed to the armed guard. "Thank you for your service. You may return to your post via the helicopter. Mr. Fortunato and the Steeles and I will be flown to a new plane, on which Captain Steele will transport me back to New Babylon."

Rayford spoke up. "And that is in—?"

Carpathia raised a hand to silence him. "Let us not give our young friend here any information he would have to be

responsible for," he said, smiling at the uniformed guard. "You may go." As the man hurried away, Carpathia spoke quietly to Rayford. "The Condor 216 awaits us near Dallas. We will then fly west to go east, if you know what I mean."

"I've never heard of a Condor 216," Rayford said. "It's unlikely I'm qualified to—"

"I have been assured," Carpathia interrupted, "that you are more than qualified."

"But what *is* a Condor 2—"

"A hybrid I designed and named myself," Carpathia said. "Surely you do not think what has happened here today was a surprise to me."

"I'm learning," Rayford said, sneaking a glance at Amanda, who appeared to be seething.

"You are learning," Carpathia repeated, smiling broadly. "I like that. Come, let me tell you about my spectacular new aircraft as we travel."

Fortunato raised a forefinger. "Sir, my recommendation is that you and I run together to the end of the airstrip and board the jet. The Steeles should follow when they see us get on board."

Carpathia held the oversized hat down onto his styled hair and slipped in behind Fortunato as the aide opened the door and nodded to the waiting jet pilot. The pilot immediately took off running toward the Learjet as Fortunato and Carpathia jogged several yards behind. Rayford slipped an arm around Amanda's waist and drew her close.

“Rayford,” Amanda said, “have you ever once in your life heard Nicolae Carpathia misspeak?”

“Misspeak?”

“Stutter, stammer, have to repeat a word, forget a name?”

Rayford suppressed a smile, amazed he could find anything humorous on what could easily be the last day of his life on earth. “Besides your name, in other words?”

“He does that on purpose, and you know it,” she said.

Rayford shrugged. “You’re probably right. But with what motive?”

“I have no idea,” she said.

“Hon, do you see no irony in your being offended by the man we’re convinced is the Antichrist?” Amanda stared at him. “I mean,” he continued, “listen to yourself. You expect common courtesy and decency from the most evil man in the history of the universe?”

Amanda shook her head and looked away. “When you put it that way,” she muttered, “I suppose I am being oversensitive.”



Buck sat in the sales manager’s office of a Land Rover dealership. “You never cease to amaze me,” Chloe whispered.

“I’ve never been conventional, have I?”

“Hardly, and now I suppose any hope of normalcy is out the window.”



"I don't need any excuse for being unique," he said, "but everyone everywhere will be acting impulsively soon enough."

The sales manager, who had busied himself with paperwork and figuring a price, turned the documents and slid them across the desk toward Buck. "You're not trading the Lincoln, then?"

"No, that's a rental," Buck said. "But I am going to ask you to return that to O'Hare for me." Buck looked up at the man without regard to the documents.

"That's highly unusual," the sales manager said. "I'd have to send two of my people and an extra vehicle so they could get back."

Buck stood. "I suppose I am asking too much. Another dealer will be willing to go the extra mile to sell me a vehicle, I'm sure, especially when no one knows what tomorrow may bring."

"Sit back down, Mr. Williams. I won't have any trouble getting my district manager to sign off on throwing in that little errand for you. As you can see, you're going to be able to drive your fully loaded Range Rover out of here within an hour for under six figures."

"Make it half an hour," Buck said, "and we've got a deal."

The sales manager rose and thrust out his hand. "Deal."

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**JERRY B. JENKINS**, former vice president for publishing at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and currently chairman of the board of trustees, is the author of more than 175 books, including the best-selling *Left Behind* series. Twenty of his books have reached the *New York Times* Best Sellers List (seven in the number-one spot) and have also appeared on the *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Wall Street Journal* best-seller lists. *Desecration*, book nine in the *Left Behind* series, was the best-selling book in the world in 2001. His books have sold nearly 70 million copies.

Also the former editor of *Moody* magazine, his writing has appeared in *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, *Parade*, *Guideposts*, *Christianity Today*, and dozens of other periodicals. He was featured on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine in 2004.

His nonfiction books include as-told-to biographies with Hank Aaron, Bill Gaither, Orel Hershiser, Luis Palau, Joe Gibbs, Walter Payton, and Nolan Ryan among many others. The Hershiser and Ryan books reached the *New York Times* Best Sellers List.

Jenkins assisted Dr. Billy Graham with his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, also a *New York Times* best seller. Jerry spent 13 months working with Dr. Graham, which he considers the privilege of a lifetime.

Jerry owns Jenkins Entertainment, a filmmaking company in Los Angeles, which produced the critically acclaimed movie *Midnight Clear*, based on his book of the same name. See [www.Jenkins-Entertainment.com](http://www.Jenkins-Entertainment.com).

Jerry Jenkins also owns the Christian Writers Guild, which aims to train tomorrow's professional Christian writers. Under Jerry's leadership, the guild has expanded to include college-credit courses, a critique service, literary registration services, and writing contests, as well as an annual conference. See [www.ChristianWritersGuild.com](http://www.ChristianWritersGuild.com).

As a marriage-and-family author, Jerry has been a frequent guest on Dr. James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* radio program and is a sought-after speaker and humorist. See [www.AmbassadorSpeakers.com](http://www.AmbassadorSpeakers.com).

Jerry has been awarded four honorary doctorates.

He and his wife, Dianna, have three grown sons and six grandchildren.

Check out Jerry's blog at <http://jerryjenkins.blogspot.com>.

**DR. TIM LAHAYE** ([www.timlahaye.com](http://www.timlahaye.com)), who conceived and created the idea of fictionalizing an account of the Rapture and the Tribulation, is a noted author, minister, and nationally recognized speaker on Bible prophecy. He is the founder of both Tim LaHaye Ministries and The PreTrib Research Center.



Dr. LaHaye speaks at many of the major Bible prophecy conferences in the U.S. and Canada, where his prophecy books are very popular.

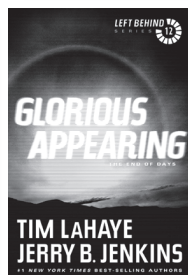
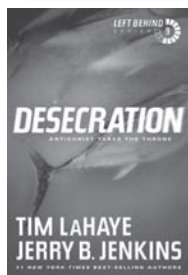
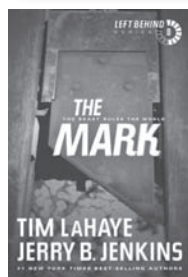
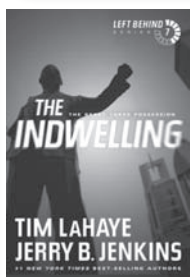
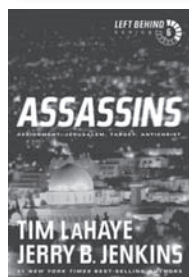
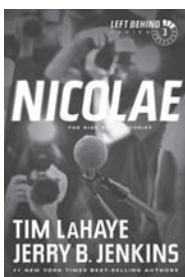
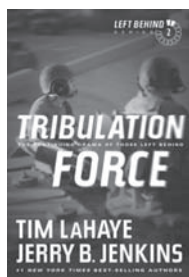
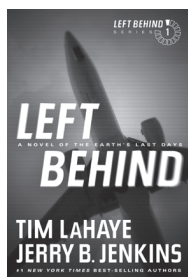
Dr. LaHaye earned a doctor of ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary and received an honorary doctor of literature degree from Liberty University. For 25 years he pastored one of the nation's outstanding churches in San Diego, which grew to three locations. During that time he founded two accredited Christian high schools, a Christian school system of ten schools, and San Diego Christian College (formerly known as Christian Heritage College).

There are over 59 million copies of Dr. LaHaye's 50 nonfiction books, some of which have been published in over 37 languages. He has written books on a wide variety of subjects, such as family life, temperaments, and Bible prophecy. His fiction works include the Left Behind series

and the Jesus Chronicles, written with Jerry B. Jenkins. LaHaye's other fiction series of prophetic novels consist of the Babylon Rising series and The End series. Dr. LaHaye is the father of four grown children, grandfather of nine, and great-grandfather of eleven.

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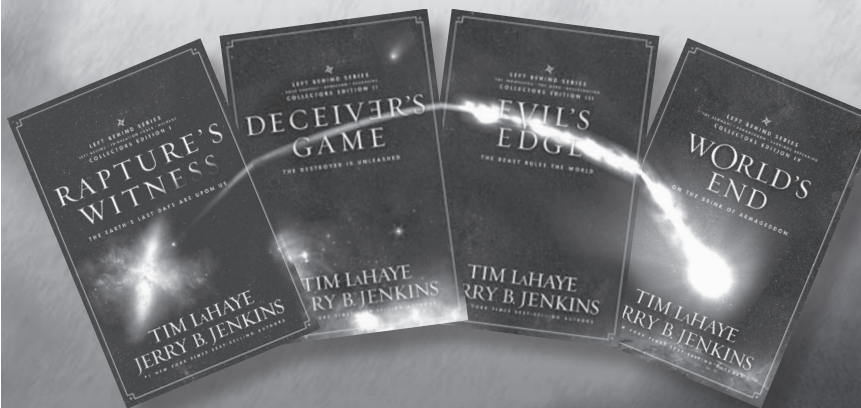
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