

LEFT BEHIND

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7

THE

THE BEAST TAKES POSSESSION

INDWELLING

TIM LAHAYE
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*To our agent, Rick Christian,
who recognized the value of the idea and the potential
of the partnership and introduced us to each other*

FORTY-TWO MONTHS INTO THE TRIBULATION

The Believers

Rayford Steele, midforties; former 747 captain for Pan-Continental; lost wife and son in the Rapture; former pilot for Global Community Potentate Nicolae Carpathia; original member of the Tribulation Force; an international fugitive in exile; fleeing Israel, site of the assassination of Carpathia

Cameron (“Buck”) Williams, early thirties; former senior writer for *Global Weekly*; former publisher of *Global Community Weekly* for Carpathia; original member of the Trib Force; editor of cybermagazine *The Truth*; fugitive in exile on assignment in Israel

Chloe Steele Williams, early twenties; former student, Stanford University; lost mother and brother in the Rapture; daughter of Rayford; wife of Buck; mother

of fourteen-month-old Kenny Bruce; CEO of the International Commodity Co-op, an underground network of believers; original Trib Force member; fugitive in exile, safe house, Mount Prospect, Illinois

Tsion Ben-Judah, late forties; former rabbinical scholar and Israeli statesman; revealed belief in Jesus as the Messiah on international TV—wife and two teenagers subsequently murdered; escaped to U.S.; spiritual leader and teacher of the Trib Force; cyberaudience of more than a billion daily; fugitive in exile at safe house

Mac McCullum, late fifties; pilot for Carpathia; New Babylon

David Hassid, midtwenties; high-level director for the GC; New Babylon

Annie Christopher, early twenties; Global Community corporal, Phoenix 216 cargo chief; in love with David Hassid; New Babylon

Leah Rose, late thirties; former head nurse, Arthur Young Memorial Hospital, Palatine, Illinois; on assignment in Brussels from safe house

Tyrola (“T”) Mark Delanty, late thirties; owner/director Palwaukee Airport, Wheeling, Illinois

Mr. and Mrs. Lukas (“Laslos”) Miklos, midfifties;
lignite-mining magnates; Greece

Abdullah Smith, early thirties; former Jordanian fighter
pilot; first officer, Phoenix 216; New Babylon

T h e E n e m i e s

Nicolae Jetty Carpathia, mid-thirties; former president of
Romania; former secretary-general, United Nations;
self-appointed Global Community potentate;
assassinated in Jerusalem; lying in state at GC palace
complex, New Babylon

Leon Fortunato, early fifties; Carpathia’s right hand
and assumed successor; GC supreme commander;
New Babylon

T h e U n d e c i d e d

Hattie Durham, early thirties; former Pan-Continental
flight attendant; former personal assistant to Nicolae
Carpathia; imprisoned in Belgium

Dr. Chaim Rosenzweig, late sixties; Israeli botanist and
statesman; discoverer of a formula that made Israeli
deserts bloom; former *Global Weekly* Person of the
Year; apparent stroke victim; Jerusalem

PROLOGUE

From Assassins

BUCK HAD DUCKED under a scaffold at the sound of the gun. A tidal wave of humanity swept past him on both sides, and he saw glee on some faces. Converts from the Wailing Wall who had seen Carpathia murder their heroes?

By the time Buck looked to the stage, the potentates were leaping off, the drapery was flying into the distance, and Chaim appeared catatonic, his head rigid.

Carpathia lay on the platform, blood running from his eyes, nose, and mouth, and—it appeared to Buck—from the top of his head. His lapel mike was still hot, and because Buck was directly under a speaker tower, he heard Nicolae's

liquid, guttural murmur, “But I thought . . . I thought . . . I did everything you asked.”

Fortunato draped his stocky body over Carpathia’s chest, reached beneath him, and cradled him. Sitting on the stage, he rocked his potentate, wailing.

“Don’t die, Excellency!” Fortunato bawled. “We need you! The world needs you! *I* need you!”

Security forces surrounded them, brandishing Uzis. Buck had experienced enough trauma for one day. He stood transfixed, with a clear view of the back of Carpathia’s blood-matted skull.

The wound was unmistakably fatal. And from where Buck stood, it was obvious what had caused it.



“I did not expect a gunshot,” Tsion said, staring at the television as GC Security cleared the stage and whisked Carpathia away.

Two hours later GC CNN confirmed the death and played over and over the grieving pronouncement of Supreme Commander Leon Fortunato. “We shall carry on in the courageous spirit of our founder and moral anchor, Potentate Nicolae Carpathia. The cause of death will remain confidential until the investigation is complete. But you may rest assured the guilty party will be brought to justice.”

The news media reported that the slain potentate’s body would lie in state in the New Babylon palace before entombment there on Sunday.

“Don’t leave the TV, Chloe,” Tsion said. “You have to assume the resurrection will be caught on camera.”

But when Friday became Saturday in Mount Prospect and Saturday night approached, even Tsion began to wonder. The Scriptures had not foretold of death by projectile. Antichrist was to die from a specific wound to the head and then come back to life. Carpathia still lay in state.

By dawn Sunday, as Tsion gloomily watched mourners pass the glass bier in the sun-drenched courtyard of the GC palace, he had begun to doubt himself.

Had he been wrong all along?



Two hours before the burial, David Hassid was called in to Leon Fortunato’s office. Leon and his directors of Intelligence and Security huddled before a TV monitor. Leon’s face revealed abject grief and the promise of vengeance. “Once His Excellency is in the tomb,” he said, his voice thick, “the world can approach closure. Prosecuting his murderer can only help. Watch with us, David. The primary angles were blocked, but look at this collateral view. Tell me if you see what we see.”

David watched.

Oh, no! he thought. It couldn’t be!

“Well?” Leon said, peering at him. “Is there any doubt?”

David stalled, but that only made the other two glance at him.

“The camera doesn’t lie,” Leon said. “We have our assassin, don’t we?”

Much as he wanted to come up with some other explanation for what was clear, David would jeopardize his position if he proved illogical. He nodded. “We sure do.”



“The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

REVELATION 11:14

Monday of Gala Week

LEAH ROSE PRIDED HERSELF on thinking under pressure. She'd been chief administrative nurse in a large hospital for a decade and had also been one of few believers there the last three and a half years. She had survived by her wits and eluded Global Community Peacekeeping Forces until finally having to flee and join the Tribulation Force.

But on the Monday of the week that would see the assassinations of the two witnesses and the Antichrist, Leah had no clue what to do. In disguise and under her alias, Donna Clendenon, she believed she had fooled authorities at the Belgium Facility for Female Rehabilitation (BFFR, or Buffer). She had passed herself off as Hattie Durham's aunt.

A squinting guard, whose nameplate read CROIX and whose accent was unmistakably French, asked, "And what makes you think your niece is incarcerated here?"

"You think I'd come all the way from California if I had any doubt?" Leah said. "Everybody knows Hattie is here, and I know her alias: Mae Willie."

The guard cocked his head. "And your message can be delivered only in person?"

"A death in the family."

"I'm sorry."

Leah pursed her lips, aware of her artificially protruding teeth. *I'll bet*, she thought.

Croix stood and riffled through pages on his clipboard. "Buffer is a maximum security facility without standard visiting privileges. Ms. Durham has been separated from the prison population. I would have to get clearance for you to see her. I could give her the message myself."

"All I want is five minutes," Leah said.

"You can imagine how short staffed we are."

Leah didn't respond. Millions had disappeared in the Rapture. Half the remaining population had died since. Everybody was short staffed. Merely existing anymore was a full-time job. Croix asked her to wait in a holding area, but he did not tell her she would see no personnel, no inmates, or even any other visitors for more than two hours. A glass cubicle, where it appeared a clerical person had once sat, was empty. No one was there whom Leah could ask how long this might take, and when she rose to look for someone else, she found she was locked in. Were they onto her? Was she now a prisoner too?

Just before Leah resorted to banging on the door and screaming for help, Croix returned. Without apology, and—she noticed—avoiding eye contact, he said, "My superiors are considering your request and will call your hotel tomorrow."

Leah fought a smile. As if I want you to know where I'm staying.

"How about I call you?" Leah said.

“Suit yourself,” Croix said with a shrug. “*Merci.*” Then, as if catching himself: “Thank you.”

Relieved to be outside, Leah drove around to be sure she wasn’t being followed. With puzzling instructions from Rayford not to call him until Friday, she phoned Buck and brought him up to date. “I don’t know whether to bolt or play it out,” she said.

That night in her hotel room, Leah felt a loneliness only slightly less acute than when she had first been left behind. She thanked God for the Tribulation Force and how they had welcomed her. All but Rayford, of course. She couldn’t figure him. Here was a brilliant, accomplished man with clear leadership skills, someone she had admired until the day she moved into the safe house. They hadn’t clicked, but everyone else seemed frustrated with him too.

In the morning Leah showered and dressed and found something to eat, planning to see Hattie as soon as she had permission. She was going to call Buffer from her untraceable cell phone, but she got caught up watching on television as Carpathia taunted Moishe and Eli before the eyes of the world.

She sat, mouth agape, as Carpathia murdered the two witnesses with a powerful handgun. Leah remembered when TV cameras would have been averted in the face of such violence. Then came the earthquake that left a tenth of Jerusalem in rubble.

The GC global network showed quake scenes interspersed with footage of the silent witnesses badgered by the smirking

Carpathia before their ignominious ends. The slow-motion pictures were broadcast over and over, and repulsed as she was, Leah could not turn away.

She had known this was coming; they all had—any students of Tsion Ben-Judah. But to see it played out shocked and saddened her, and Leah's eyes swam. She knew how it was to turn out, too, that they would be resurrected and that Carpathia would get his. Leah prayed for her new friends, some of whom were in Jerusalem. But she didn't want to sit there blubbing when she had work to do too. Things would get a lot worse than this, and Leah needed the training of performing under pressure to prepare herself and to convince herself she was up to it.

The phone at Buffer rang and rang, and Leah was at least warmed to know that the world government suffered just like the rank and file with the loss of half the population. Finally a woman picked up, but Leah couldn't get her even to acknowledge an employee named Croix.

"A French guard?" Leah tried.

"Ah, I know who you mean. Hold on."

Finally a man picked up. "Who are you holding for, please?" he said, in a hurry.

"Guard Croix," she said, "about six feet—"

"Croix!" the man hollered. "Phone!"

But he never came to the phone. Leah finally hung up and drove to the prison, leaving her phone in the car for safety.

At long last Croix ushered her into yet another private room. This one had a large window that Leah thought might

be a two-way mirror. Again she feared her cover might have already been blown.

"I thought you were going to call," the guard said, pointing to a chair, ubiquitous clipboard in hand.

"I tried," she said. "This place is poorly run."

"Understaffed," he said.

"Can we get on with it?" Leah said. "I need to see my niece."

"No."

"No?"

Croix stared at her, apparently unwilling to repeat himself.

"I'm listening," she said.

"I'm not at liberty to—"

"Don't give me that," Leah said. "If I can't see her, I can't see her, but I have the right to know she's healthy, that she's alive."

"She is both."

"Then why can't I see her?"

Croix pressed his lips together. "She's been transferred, ma'am."

"Since yesterday?"

"I'm not at liberty to—"

"How long has she been gone? Where is she?"

He shook his head. "I'm telling you what I was told. If you'd like to get a message to—"

"I want to see her. I want to know she's all right."

"To the best of my knowledge, she's fi—"

“The best of your knowledge! Have you an inkling how limited your knowledge is?”

“Insulting me will not—”

“I don’t mean to insult you, sir! I’m merely asking to see my niece and—”

“That’s enough, Officer Croix,” came a female voice from behind the glass. “You may go.”

Croix left without a word or a look. Leah detected an Asian accent in the woman. She stood and stepped to the mirror. “So, what’s next, ma’am? Am I to leave too, or will I get some word about my niece?”

Silence.

“Have I now become a prisoner too? Guilt by relation?”

Leah felt conspicuous and wondered whether anyone was behind the glass after all. Finally she marched to the door but was not surprised to find herself locked in again. “Terrific,” she said, heading back toward the mirror. “What are the magic words that get me out of here? C’mon, lady! I know you’re back there!”

“You will be free to go when we say you are free to go.”

The same woman. Leah pictured her older, matronly, and clearly Asian. She raised her palms in surrender and plopped into a chair. She started and looked up when she heard a buzz in the door latch. “You may go.”

Leah shot a double take at the mirror. “I may?”

“She who hesitates . . .”

“Oh, I’m going,” she said, rising. “Could I at least see *you* on my way out? Please? I just want to know—”

“You’re trying my patience, Mrs. Clendenon. You have received all the information you will get here.”

Leah stopped with her hand on the doorknob, shaking her head, hoping to weasel something from the disembodied voice.

“Go, ma’am!” the woman said. “While you have the option.”

Leah had given her best. She wasn’t willing to go to prison for this caper. For another effort, maybe, another assignment. She would sacrifice her freedom for Dr. Ben-Judah. But for Hattie? Hattie’s own doctor had died treating her, and she seemed barely grateful.

Leah moved briskly through the echoing corridors. She heard a door behind her and, hoping to catch a glimpse of the woman, turned quickly. A small, trim, pale, dark-haired woman in uniform turned and headed the other way. Could that have been her?

Leah headed for the main entrance but turned at the last instant and stepped behind a bank of phones. At least it looked like a bank of phones. She wanted to pretend to be talking on one while anyone who might follow her rushed out the door, but every phone was in shambles, wires hanging.

She was about to abandon her plan when she heard quick footsteps and saw a young Asian woman hurry out the front door, car keys jangling. Leah was convinced this was the same woman who had ducked away when she turned around. Now Leah was following *her*.

She hesitated inside the glass doors, watching as the

woman trotted to the visitor parking lot and scanned the area. Apparently frustrated, she turned and walked slowly back toward the entrance. Leah nonchalantly exited, hoping to get a straight-on look at the woman. If she could get her to speak, she would know whether she had been the one behind the glass.

An employee of the GC and she's worse at this than I am, Leah thought, as the woman noticed her, appeared startled, then fought to act normal. As they neared one another, Leah asked where a washroom was, but the woman tugged her tiny uniform cap tighter onto her head and turned away to cough as she passed, not hearing or pretending not to.

Leah pulled out of the unattended lot and waited at a stop sign a quarter mile away, where she could see the prison entrance in her rearview mirror. The woman hurried out and hopped into a compact four-door. Determined to lose her, Leah raced off and got lost trying to find her hotel via side streets.

She called Rayford again and again. No way this could wait until Friday. When he didn't answer she worried that his phone might have fallen into the wrong hands. She left a cryptic message: "Our bird has flown the cage. Now what?"

She drove into the country, convinced no one was following her, and found her way back to the hotel at dusk. She had been in her room less than half an hour when the phone rang.

"This is Donna," she said.

"You have a visitor," the clerk said. "May I send her back?"

“No! Who is it?”

“‘A friend’ is all she’ll say.”

“I’ll come there,” Leah said.

She stuffed her belongings into a bag and slipped out to her car. She tried to peer into the lobby through the plate glass, but she couldn’t see who was there. As she started the car, someone drove behind her and stopped. Leah was pinned in. She locked her doors as the driver emerged from the other vehicle.

As Leah’s eyes adjusted to the light, she could see it was the same car the woman had driven from the prison. A knock made her jump. The woman, still in uniform, signaled her to lower her window. Leah lowered it an inch, her heart thudding.

“I need to make a show of this,” the woman whispered. “Play your part.”

My part? “What do you want?” Leah said.

“Come with me.”

“Not on your life! Unless you want your car in pieces, get it out of my way.”

The woman leaned forward. “Excellent. Now step out and let me cuff you and—”

“Are you out of your mind? I have no intention of—”

“Perhaps you cannot see my forehead in the darkness,” the woman said. “But trust me—”

“Why should I—?”

And then Leah saw it. The woman had the mark. She was a believer.

The woman pointed to the lock as she removed handcuffs from a holster on her belt. Leah unlocked the door. "How did you find me?" she said.

"Checked your alias at several hotels. Didn't take long."

"Alias?" Leah said as she alighted and turned so the woman could cuff her.

"I'm Ming Toy," she said, leading Leah to the backseat of her car. "A believer comes all the way to Brussels to see Hattie Durham and uses her own name? I don't think so."

"I'm supposed to be her aunt," Leah said as Ming pulled out of the parking lot.

"Well, that worked on everybody else," she said. "But they didn't see what I saw. So, who are you and what are you doing here?"

"Would you mind if I double-checked your mark, Miss Toy?"

"*Mrs.* I'm a widow."

"Me too."

"But call me Ming."

"I'll tell you what you can call me as soon as I can check your mark."

"In a minute."

Ming pulled into a GC Peacekeeping station. "I need an interrogation room," she barked at the man behind the desk, still holding tight to Leah's left biceps.

"Commander," the man said with a nod, sliding a key across the counter. "Last door on the left."

"Private, no viewing, no bugs."

“That’s the secure one, ma’am.”

Ming locked the door, angled the lamp shade toward them, and released Leah from her cuffs. “Check me out,” she said, sitting and cocking her head.

Leah gently held the back of Ming’s head, knowing already that anyone who would let her do that had to be genuine. She licked her thumb and ran it firmly across the mark on Ming’s forehead. Leah slumped into a chair across from Ming and reached for both her hands. “I can’t wait to get to know you,” she said.

“Likewise,” Ming said. “Let’s pray first.”

Leah couldn’t keep from welling up as this brand-new friend thanked God for their propitious meeting and asked that he allow them to somehow work together.

“First I’ll tell you where Hattie Durham is,” Ming said. “Then we’ll trade stories, and I’ll take you back to your hotel, tell my associates that you check out as Hattie’s aunt, and let them think that you believe Hattie was transferred but that you don’t know where.”

“She wasn’t transferred?”

Ming shook her head.

“Is she alive?”

“Temporarily.”

“Healthy?”

“Healthier than when we got her. In fact, she’s in quite good shape. Strong enough to assassinate a potentate.”

Leah furrowed her brow and shook her head. “I’m not following you.”

“They let her go.”

“Why?”

“All she talked about was killing Carpathia. Finally they told her that as it was clear she had lost his baby, she was no longer a threat and was free to go, with a tidy settlement for her trouble. Roughly one hundred thousand Nicks in cash.”

Leah shook her head. “They don’t consider her a threat? She wants to kill him for real.”

“They know that,” Ming said. “In my opinion, they think she’s dumber than she looks.”

“Sometimes she is,” Leah said.

“But not dumb enough to lead them straight to the rest of the Tribulation Force,” Ming said. “The simplistic plan is that they follow her to the Gala in Jerusalem and to some sort of a rendezvous with one of you Judah-ites.”

“I love that title. I’m a believer first, but also proudly a Judah-ite.”

“Me too,” Ming said. “And I’ll bet you know Ben-Judah personally.”

“I do.”

“Wow.”

“But, Ming, the GC is wrong about Hattie. She’s crazy enough to go and try to kill Nicolae, but she has no interest in contacting any of us.”

“You might be surprised.”

“How so?”

“She didn’t go to Jerusalem like they hoped. We’ve tracked

her to North America. I think she's onto the GC and wants to get back to safety as soon as she can."

"That's worse!" Leah said. "She'll lead them to the safe house."

"Maybe that's why God sent you here," Ming said. "I didn't know what I was going to do to protect you people. Whom was I supposed to tell? You're the answer to my prayer."

"But what can I do? I'll never be able to catch her before she gets there."

"You can at least warn them, right?"

Leah nodded. "My phone's in my bag in my car."

"And my phones are all traceable."

They traded stories on the way back. Ming was twenty-two years old, a native of China. Her husband of two months had been killed a few minutes after the disappearances when the commuter train he was on crashed when the brakeman and several controllers vanished. She had joined the GC in a paroxysm of patriotism shortly after the treaty was signed between the United Nations and Israel. She had been assigned to the reconstruction administration in what used to be the Philippines, but there she had become a believer through the letters of her brother at home, now seventeen. "Chang's friends had led him to faith," she said. "He has not yet told my parents, who are very old school and very pro-Carpathia, especially my father. I worry about Chang."

Ming had applied for work in the peacekeeping forces, hoping for just this sort of opportunity to aid fellow

believers. "I don't know how much longer I can remain inside undercover."

"How did you get to a position of authority over so many guards?"

"It's not so big a deal as it sounds. The population decimation didn't hurt."

"C'mon! You're in management."

"Well, in all humility, a stratospheric IQ doesn't hurt. That and wrestling," she added, seeming to fight a smile. "Two out of three falls."

"You're not serious."

"They know Greco-Roman. I know martial arts." Ming pulled into the hotel parking lot. "Call your friends right away," she said. "And stay away from Buffer. I'll cover for you."

"Thank God for you, Ming," Leah said, again overcome. They traded phone numbers. "The day will come when you need a safe place too. Keep in touch." They embraced, and Leah hurried to get her bag and get back into her room.

There was no answer at the safe house, and Leah worried it had already been compromised. Had it already been overrun? And what of her new friends? She tried Rayford's number, then the safe house, again and again.

Unable to reach anyone, Leah knew she had a better chance of helping the Trib Force in North America than from a Brussels hotel room. She found a flight and headed home that very night. All the way back she tried the safe house phone, to no avail.

CHAPTER 1

BUCK BRACED HIMSELF with his elbow crooked around a scaffolding pole. Thousands of panicked people fleeing the scene had, like him, started and involuntarily turned away from the deafening gunshot. It had come from perhaps a hundred feet to Buck's right and was so loud he would not have been surprised if even those at the back of the throng of some two million had heard it plainly.

He was no expert, but to Buck it had sounded like a high-powered rifle. The only weapon smaller that had emitted such a report was the ugly handgun Carpathia had used to destroy the skulls of Moishe and Eli three days before. Actually, the sounds were eerily similar. Had Carpathia's own weapon been fired? Might someone on his own staff have targeted him?

The lectern had shattered loudly as well, like a tree branch split by lightning. And that gigantic backdrop sailing into the distance . . .

Buck wanted to bolt with the rest of the crowd, but he worried about Chaim. Had he been hit? And where was Jacov? Just ten minutes before, Jacov had waited below stage left where Buck could see him. No way Chaim's friend and aide would abandon him during a crisis.

As people stampeded by, some went under the scaffold, most went around it, and some jostled both Buck and the support poles, making the structure sway. Buck held tight and looked to where giant speakers three stories up leaned this way and that, threatening their flimsy plywood supports.

Buck could choose his poison: step into the surging crowd and risk being trampled or step up a few feet on the angled crossbar. He stepped up and immediately felt the fluidity of the structure. It bounced and seemed to want to spin as Buck looked toward the platform over the tops of a thousand streaking heads. He had heard Carpathia's lament and Fortunato's keening, but suddenly the sound—at least in the speakers above him—went dead.

Buck glanced up just in time to see a ten-foot-square speaker box tumble from the top. "Look out!" he shrieked to the crowd, but no one heard or noticed. He looked up again to be sure he was out of the way. The box snapped its umbilicals like string, which redirected its path some fifteen feet away from the tower. Buck watched in horror as a woman was crushed beneath it and several other men and

women were staggered. A man tried to drag the victim from beneath the speaker, but the crowd behind him never slowed. Suddenly the running mass became a cauldron of humanity, trampling each other in their desperation to get free of the carnage.

Buck could not help. The entire scaffolding was pivoting, and he felt himself swing left. He hung on, not daring to drop into the torrent of screaming bodies. He caught sight of Jacov at last, trying to make his way up the side steps to the platform where Carpathia's security detail brandished Uzis.

A helicopter attempted to land near the stage but had to wait until the crowd cleared. Chaim sat motionless in his chair, facing to Buck's right, away from Carpathia and Fortunato. He appeared stiff, his head cocked and rigid, as if unable to move. If he had not been shot, Buck wondered if he'd had another stroke, or worse, a heart attack. He knew if Jacov could get to him, he would protect Chaim and get him somewhere safe.

Buck tried to keep an eye on Jacov while Fortunato waved at the helicopters, pleading with one to land and get Carpathia out of there. Jacov finally broke free and sprinted up the steps, only to be dealt a blow from the butt end of an Uzi that knocked him off his feet and into the crowd.

The impact snapped Jacov's head back so violently that Buck was certain he was unconscious and unable to protect himself from trampling. Buck leaped off the scaffold and into the fray, fighting his way toward Jacov. He moved around the fallen speaker box and felt the sticky blood underfoot.

As Buck neared where he thought Jacov should be he took one more look at the platform before the angle would obscure his view. Chaim's chair was moving! He was headed full speed toward the back of the platform. Had he leaned against the joystick? Was he out of control? If he didn't stop or turn, he would pitch twelve feet to the pavement and certain death. His head was still cocked, his body stiff.

Buck reached Jacov, who lay splayed, his head awkwardly flopped to one side, eyes staring, limbs limp. A sob worked its way to Buck's throat as he elbowed stragglers out of the way and knelt to put a thumb and forefinger to Jacov's throat. No pulse.

Buck wanted to drag the body from the scene but feared he would be recognized despite his extensive facial scars. There was nothing he could do for Jacov. But what about Chaim?

Buck sprinted left around the platform and skidded to a stop at the back corner, from where he could see Chaim's wheelchair crumpled on the ground, backstage center. The heavy batteries had broken open and lay twenty feet from the chair, which had one wheel bent almost in half, seat pad missing, and a footrest broken off. Was Buck about to find another friend dead?

He loped to the mangled chair and searched the area, including under the platform. Besides splinters from what he was sure had been the lectern, he found nothing. How could Chaim have survived this? Many of the world rulers had scrambled off the back of the stage, certainly having to

turn and hang from the edge first to avoid serious injury. Even then, many would have had to have suffered sprained or broken ankles. But an elderly stroke victim riding in a metal chair twelve feet to concrete? Buck feared Chaim could not have survived. But who would have carried him off?

A chopper landed on the other side of the platform, and medical personnel rushed the stage. The security detail fanned out and began descending the stairs to clear the area.

Four emergency medical technicians crowded around Carpathia and Fortunato while others attended the trampled and the crushed, including the woman beneath the speaker box. Jacov was lifted into a body bag. Buck nearly wept at having to leave his brother that way, yet he knew Jacov was in heaven. He ran to catch up with the crowd now spilling into the streets.

Buck knew Jacov was dead. From the wound at the back of Carpathia's head, he assumed Nicolae was dead or soon would be. And he had to assume Chaim was dead too.

Buck longed for the end of all this and the glorious appearing of Christ. But that was still another three and a half years off.



Rayford felt a fool, running with the crowd, the hem of his robe in his hands to keep from tripping. He had dropped the Saber and its box and wanted to use his arms for more speed. But he had to run like a woman in a long skirt. Adrenaline carried him, because he felt fast as ever, regardless. Rayford

really wanted to shed the robe and turban, but the last thing he needed just then was to look like a Westerner.

Had he murdered Carpathia? He had tried to, intended to, but couldn't pull the trigger. Then, when he was bumped and the gun went off, he couldn't imagine he'd been lucky enough to find his target. Could the bullet have ricocheted off the lectern and into Carpathia? Could it also have passed through him and taken out the backdrop? It didn't seem possible.

If he had killed the potentate, there was certainly no satisfaction in it, no relief or sense of accomplishment. As he hurried along, the screams and moans of Carpathia's faithful all around him, Rayford felt he was running from a prison of his own making.

He was sucking wind by the time the crowd thinned and began to disperse, and when he stopped to bend at the waist, hands on his hips, to catch his breath, a couple hurrying past said, "Isn't it awful? They think he's dead!"

"It's awful," Rayford gasped, not looking at them.

Assuming TV cameras had caught everything, especially him with the gun raised, it wouldn't be long before he would be sought. As soon as he was away from the busy streets, he shed the garb and stuffed it in a trash barrel. He found his car, eager to get to Tel Aviv and out of Israel before it became impossible.



Mac stood near the back of the throng, far enough from the gun that the report didn't reach his ears until after the massive

crowd began to move. While others near him shrieked and gasped and pleaded to know what was going on, he kept his eyes on the stage, relief washing over him. So, he would not have to sacrifice himself and Abdullah to be sure Carpathia was dead. From the commotion down front and from his view of the platform via jumbo screens nearby, it was clear to Mac that Nicolae had suffered the massive head wound believers knew was coming.

Ever the professional, Mac knew what would be expected of him. He slid his cell phone from his jacket and dialed Tel Aviv Operations. "You got a pilot rated to shuttle the 216 to Jerusalem and is it light enough to land and take off on the short runway?"

"Already looking, sir, and it's light enough to do it. This is a tragedy."

"Yeah."

Mac dialed Abdullah. From the limited noise in the background, he could tell his first officer was not at the Gala. "You hear, Ab?"

"I heard. Shall I go get the Phoenix?"

"Hang loose; they're trying to get it here. I saw you leave the hotel. Where are you?"

"Doctor Pita's. I suppose I'll look suspicious finishing my meal when the big boss is dying and everyone else has run into the streets looking for a TV."

"Stick it in your pocket, and if you don't hear from me, meet me at Jerusalem Airport in an hour."

Mac made his way to the front of the plaza as the place

emptied in a frenzy. He flashed his ID when necessary, and by the time he reached the platform, it was clear Carpathia was in the final throes of life. His wrists were drawn up under his chin, eyes shut tight and bleeding, blood trickling also from his ears and mouth, and his legs shook violently, toes pointed, knees locked.

“Oh, he’s gone! He’s gone!” Leon wailed. “Someone do something.”

The four emergency medical technicians, portable monitors beeping, knelt over Carpathia. They cleared his mouth so they could administer oxygen, studied a blood pressure gauge, pumped his chest, cradled his head, and tried to stanch the flow from a wound that left them kneeling in more blood than it seemed a body could hold.

Mac peeked past the panicky Fortunato to see Carpathia’s normally tanned hands and face already pale. No one could survive this, and Mac wondered if the bodily movements were merely posthumous reflexes.

“There is a hospital nearby, Commander,” one of the EMTs said, which threw Fortunato into a rage. He had just made eye contact with Mac and seemed about to say something when he turned on the EMT.

“Are you crazy? These—these *people* are not qualified! We must get him to New Babylon.”

He turned to Mac. “Is the 216 ready?”

“On its way from Tel Aviv. Should be able to lift off in an hour.”

“An hour?! Should we helicopter him straight to Tel Aviv?”

“Jerusalem Airport will be faster,” Mac said.

“There’s no room to stabilize him in a chopper, sir,” the EMT said.

“We have no choice!” Fortunato said. “An ambulance would be too slow.”

“But an ambulance has equipment that might—”

“Just get him into the chopper!” Fortunato said.

But as the EMT turned away looking disgusted, a female colleague looked up at him. Carpathia was still. “No vitals,” she said. “He’s flat lined.”

“No!” Leon bellowed, bullying his way between them and kneeling in Nicolae’s blood. Again he leaned over the body, but rather than holding Carpathia to him, he buried his face in the lifeless chest and sobbed aloud.

Security Chief Walter Moon dismissed the EMTs with a nod, and as they gathered up their equipment and went for the gurney, he gently pulled Leon away from Carpathia. “Don’t drape the body,” he said. “Let’s load ’im up now. Say nothing about his condition until we’re back home.”

“Who did this, Walter?” Fortunato whined. “Did we catch him?”

Moon shrugged and shook his head.



Buck ran toward the hostel. He dialed Chaim’s number again, as he had all along the way. It went to voice mail, but he didn’t want to leave a message. The people in Chaim’s house—Stefan the valet, Jacob’s wife, Hannelore, and Hannelore’s

mother—had to have been watching on TV and were likely calling anyone they knew for news of their loved ones.

Finally, Hannelore answered. “Jacov!” she shouted.

“No, Hannelore, this is Greg North.”

“Buck!” she wailed. “What happened? Where—”

“Hannelore!” Buck said. “Your phone is not secure!”

“I don’t care anymore, Buck! If we die, we die! Where is Jacov? What happened to Chaim?”

“I need to meet you somewhere, Hannelore. If Chaim shows up there—”

“Chaim is all right?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t see him after—”

“Did you see Jacov?”

“Meet me, Hannelore. Call me from another phone and—”

“Buck, you tell me right now! Did you see him?”

“I saw him.”

“Is he alive?”

“Hannelore—”

“Buck, is he dead?”

“I’m sorry. Yes.”

She began to wail, and in the background Buck heard a scream. Hannelore’s mother? Had she deduced the news?

“Buck, they’re here!”

“What? Who?”

He heard a door smashing, a yell, another scream.

“GC!” she whispered fiercely. And the phone went dead.



Onboard the Phoenix 216, Nicolae Carpathia's personal physician examined him and pronounced him dead.

"Where were you?" Leon demanded. "You could have done something."

"Where I was supposed to be, Commander," the doctor said, "in the auxiliary trailer a hundred yards behind the platform. Security would not let me out, fearing more gunfire."

As the 216 taxied toward the runway, Leon came to the cockpit and told Abdullah, "Patch me through to Director Hassid at the palace, secure line."

Abdullah nodded and glanced at Mac as Fortunato backed out. The first officer made the connection and informed Leon over the intercom. With creative switch flipping, Abdullah allowed Mac to listen in, while muting the input button to keep out noise from the cockpit.

"You're aware of the awful news, David?" Leon said.

"I heard, yes, sir," David said. "How is the potentate?"

"He's dead, David . . ."

"Oh."

". . . but this is top secret by order of Chief Moon until further notice."

"I understand."

"Oh, David, what will we do?"

"We'll look to you, sir."

"Well, thank you for those kind words at such a time, but I need something from you."

“Yes, sir.”

“Scramble the satellites to make it impossible for those who did this to communicate with each other by phone. Can you do that?”

A long pause. “Scrambling the satellites” was not the exact terminology, but David could produce Fortunato’s desired result. “Yes,” he said slowly. “It’s possible, of course. You realize the ramifications . . .”

Mac whispered to Abdullah. “Call Buck, call Rayford, call the safe house. Leon’s going to shut down communications. If they need to talk to each other, it has to be now.”

“Tell me,” Leon said.

“We’re all served by the same system,” David said. “It’s the reason we’ve never been able to shut down the Judah-ites’ Internet transmissions.”

“So if they’re shut down, we’re shut down?”

“Exactly.”

“Do it anyway. The landlines in New Babylon would still be operable, would they not?”

“They would, and this would not affect television transmission, but your long distance is all satellite dependent.”

“So those of us in New Babylon would be able to communicate only with each other.”

“Right.”

“We’ll get by. I’ll let you know when to unscramble.”

Two minutes later Leon called David again. “How long does this take?” he said. “I should not be able to reach you!”

“Three minutes,” David said.

“I’ll check back in four.”

“You’ll not reach me, sir.”

“I should hope not!”

But four minutes later Leon was preoccupied with the doctor. “I want an autopsy,” he said, “but zero leaks about cause of death.” Through the reverse intercom bug, Mac heard Leon’s voice catch. “And I want this man prepared for viewing and for burial by the finest mortuary technician in the world. Is that understood?”

“Of course, Commander. As you wish.”

“I don’t want the staff butcher in the palace, so whom would you suggest?”

“One who could use the business, frankly.”

“How crass! This would be a service to the Global Community!”

“But surely you’re prepared to reimburse—”

“Of course, but not if money is the primary concern. . . .”

“It’s not, Commander. I simply know that Dr. Eikenberry’s mortuary has been decimated. She’s lost more than half her staff and has had to reorganize her business.”

“And she’s local?”

“Baghdad.”

“I do not want Nicolae shipped to Baghdad. Can she come to the palace morgue?”

“I’m sure she’d be more than happy . . .”

“Happy?”

“Willing, sir.”

“I hope she can work miracles.”

"Fortunately his face was not affected."

"Still," Leon said, his voice husky again, "how do you hide the, the . . . awful injury?"

"I'm sure it can be done."

"He must look perfect, dignified. The whole world will mourn him."

"I'll call her now."

"Yes, please try. I'd like to know whether you're able to get through."

But he was not able. Global telephone communications were off the air. And Abdullah too had failed to reach anyone.

Mac was about to shut off the intercom bug when he heard Leon take a huge breath and let it out. "Doctor?" he said. "Can your mortician, ah—"

"Dr. Eikenberry."

"Right. Can she do a cast of the potentate's body?"

"A cast?"

"You know, some sort of plaster or plastic or something that would preserve his exact dimensions and features?"

The doctor hesitated. "Well," he said finally, "death masks are nothing new. A whole corpse would be quite an undertaking, pardon the expression."

"But it could be done?"

Another pause. "I should think the body would have to be dipped. The palace morgue has a large enough tank."

"It could be done then?"

“Anything can be done, Excellency. I’m sorry, I mean Commander.”

Fortunato cleared his throat. “Yes, please, Doctor. Don’t call me Excellency. At least not yet. And do arrange for a cast of the potentate’s body.”

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 Hershisier, Luis Palau, Joe Gibbs, Walter Payton, and Nolan Ryan among many others. The Hershisier 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.

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.

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.

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. TIMLAHAYE (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.

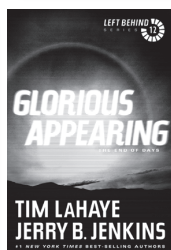
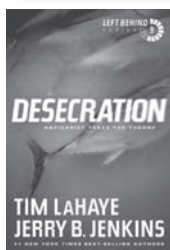
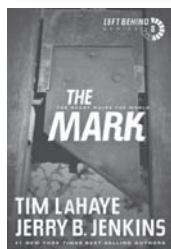
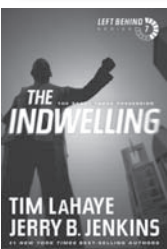
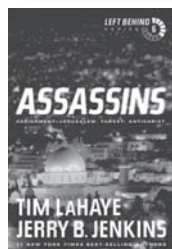
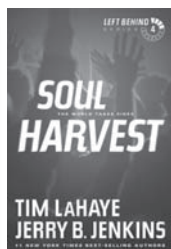
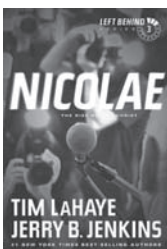
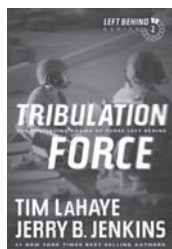
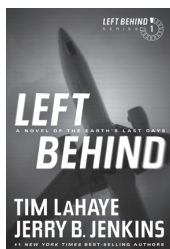
Dr. LaHaye earned a doctor of ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary and received an honorary doctor of literature degree from Liberty University. For 25 years he pastored one of the nation's outstanding churches in San Diego, which grew to three locations. During that time he founded two 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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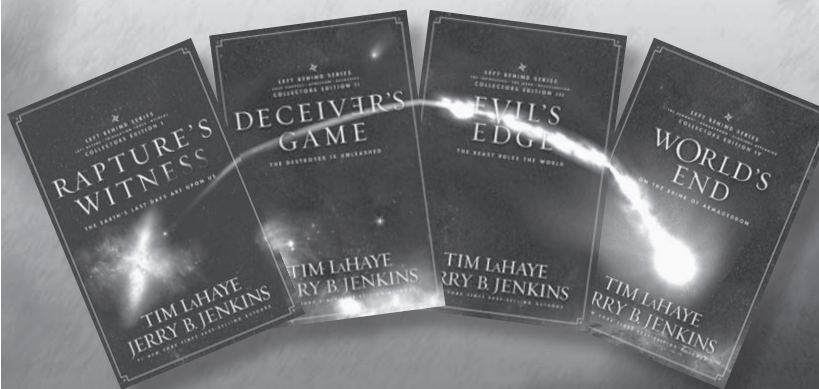
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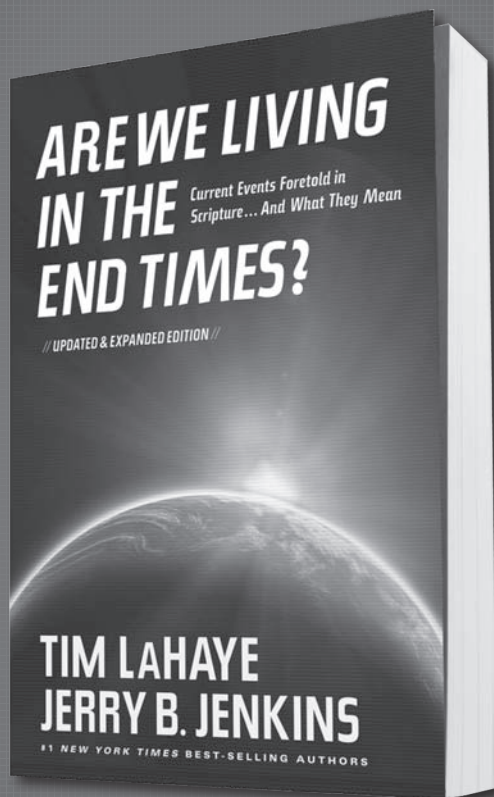
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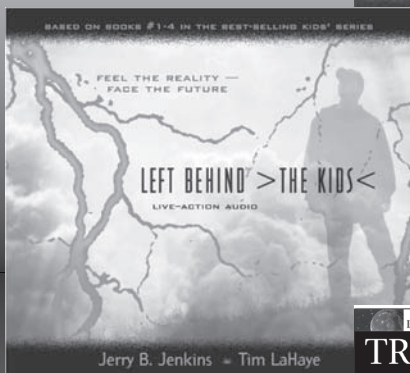
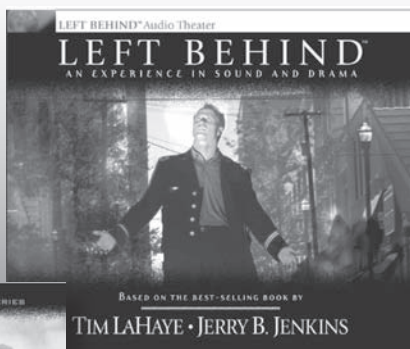
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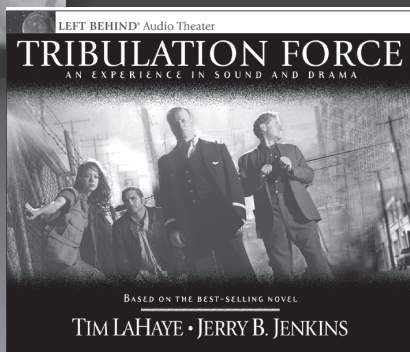
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