

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

Adventures in  
**ODYSSEY**

# YOUNG WHIT

&  
*the Shroud of Secrecy*



*Dave Arnold & Phil Lollar*

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TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

*Young Whit and the Shroud of Secrecy*

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Cover illustration by Sergio Cariello

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For manufacturing information regarding this product, please call 1-800-323-9400.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

**For Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data for this title, visit <http://www.loc.gov/help/contact-general.html>.**

ISBN: 978-1-58997-585-9

Printed in China

25	24	23	22	21	20	19
7	6	5	4	3	2	1



## Chapter One



John Avery Whittaker stood perched on the rooftop of the oversize shed in his backyard, his breath held in a mix of fear and eager anticipation. From where he stood, the distance to the ground must have been at least twenty feet.

*Surely that will be enough to achieve lift,* he thought.

His arms wagged up and down, but the drag from the wings he had fashioned out of a mixture of cloth, leaves, and feathers did little to elevate him. Instead, it made his arms feel heavy and tired.

Not a good sign.

His prior attempt with papier-mâché wings failed before it ever began. His stepmother, Fiona, made him abort his flight out of a fair concern that he would break his neck in the attempt. He realized she was right. Those wings were far too heavy. Almost as heavy as his arms felt at this very moment.

But these wings, which had been patterned roughly after Leonardo da Vinci's "ornithopter" flying machine, had enough resistance to displace a good chunk of air—surely enough to levitate a lean ten-year-old boy. And they seemed light enough to somewhat oppose the laws of gravity. At the least, he should land softly enough to avoid a trip to the hospital. That was the hope, anyway.

Johnny stood on the roof's edge, wondering whether this was how young Icarus felt. Johnny had read the Greek myth that detailed Daedalus and his son Icarus's attempt to escape imprisonment by Cretan King Minos, using wings fashioned of feathers held together by wax. Johnny's smile disappeared when he recalled that their attempt failed when Icarus flew too close to the sun. The wax melted, his wings fell apart, and Icarus fell into the sea and drowned.

Undeterred, Johnny girded his courage, flapped his

arms fervently, and, setting fear aside—in a leap of faith encouraged by the science of ornithology—jumped mightily into the air.

As his body thrust inches above the rooftop, he imagined himself besting the glorious flight of Orville and Wilbur Wright, the pioneers of aviation.

When he finally awoke from his concussive state to see his father hovering over him, he realized that the Wright brothers' record had surely survived . . . just as he somehow had done.

“John, if you live to be fifteen, it’ll be a miracle,” his father said.

As Johnny saw his father loom over him, he realized two very important things. The first was that he wanted every kid to have the opportunity to feel the way he felt when he jumped off that ledge. The thrill of that moment, when he experienced the effortless exploits of the simplest baby birds born every day, was unimaginable.

The second was that he wanted every kid to have that experience . . . *without* jumping. As thrilling as the jump had been, it could never surpass the pain of the crash landing.

But as Johnny lay there gasping for breath, he already

knew that both joy and pain would most likely be his constant companions through life.

*There has to be a way to cheat pain, he thought. If only we could have the same thrill inside our imagination.*