



ANTICHRIST TAKES THE THRONE

DESECRATION

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*To Murf, Timmy Mac, and Mary,
with gratitude*

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to David Allen
for expert technical consultation*

FORTY-TWO MONTHS INTO THE TRIBULATION; TWENTY-FIVE DAYS INTO THE GREAT TRIBULATION

T h e B e l i e v e r s

Rayford Steele, mid-forties; 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; international fugitive; on assignment at Mizpe Ramon in the Negev Desert, center for Operation Eagle

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; incognito at the King David Hotel, Jerusalem

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

fifteen-month-old Kenny Bruce; CEO of International Commodity Co-op, an underground network of believers; original Trib Force member; fugitive in exile, Strong Building, Chicago

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, Strong Building, Chicago

Dr. Chaim Rosenzweig, late sixties; Nobel Prize-winning Israeli botanist and statesman; former *Global Weekly* Newsmaker of the Year; murderer of Carpathia; incognito, the King David Hotel, Jerusalem

Leah Rose, late thirties; former head nurse, Arthur Young Memorial Hospital, Palatine, Illinois; on Trib Force assignment en route to Mizpe Ramon

Hattie Durham, early thirties; former Pan-Continental flight attendant; former personal assistant to Carpathia; on Trib Force assignment in Israel

Al B. (aka “Albie”), late forties; native of Al Basrah, north of Kuwait; pilot; former international black marketer; assisting Rayford at Mizpe Ramon

David Hassid, mid-twenties; high-level director for the GC; presumed dead in plane crash; actually en route to Mizpe Ramon

Mac McCullum, late fifties; pilot for Carpathia; presumed dead in plane crash; actually en route to Mizpe Ramon

Abdullah Smith, early thirties; former Jordanian fighter pilot; first officer, Phoenix 216; presumed dead in plane crash; actually en route to Mizpe Ramon

Hannah Palemoon, late twenties; GC nurse; presumed dead in plane crash; actually en route to Mizpe Ramon

Ming Toy, early twenties; widow; former guard at the Belgium Facility for Female Rehabilitation (Buffer); AWOL from the GC; Strong Building, Chicago

Chang Wong, seventeen; Ming Toy's brother; new employee, Global Community Headquarters, New Babylon

Lukas ("Laslos") Miklos, mid-fifties; lignite-mining magnate; lost wife, pastor, and pastor's wife to Nicolae Carpathia's guillotines; in hiding, Greece, United Carpathian States

Gustaf Zuckerman Jr. (aka "Zeke" or "Z"), early twenties; document forger and disguise specialist; lost father to guillotine; fugitive in exile, Strong Building, Chicago

Steve Plank (aka Pinkerton Stephens), fiftyish, former editor of *Global Weekly*; former public relations director for Carpathia; assumed dead in wrath of the Lamb earthquake; undercover with GC Peacekeeping forces

DESECRATION

Unknown male, fifteen; escaped loyalty mark center in Ptolemaïs, Greece, with Albie's and Buck's help; whereabouts unknown

Unknown female, sixteen; escaped loyalty mark center in Ptolemaïs, Greece, with Albie's and Buck's help; whereabouts unknown

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; resurrected at GC palace complex, New Babylon; visiting Jerusalem

Leon Fortunato, early fifties; former supreme commander and Carpathia's right hand; now Most High Reverend Father of Carpathianism, proclaiming the potentate as the risen god; in Jerusalem with Carpathia

P R O L O G U E

From The Mark

“WE CAN all keep our fingers crossed,” Mac said. “I’ve seen those Quasis do amazing things based solely on what the flight management system onboard computer tells it to do. But this is a long flight on its own, and I’ve asked it to do some interesting stuff, barring turbulence.”

“Cross our fingers?” Hannah said. “Only God can make this work. You’re the expert, Captain McCullum, but if this thing goes down anywhere but deep in the Mediterranean, it won’t take long for someone to discover no one was aboard.”

This plane was not free-falling toward the Mediterranean. No, this multimillion-Nick marvel of modern technology was accelerating, her burner cans hot, the vapor shimmering in a long trail. The strange attitude and angle sent the craft careening toward the shore approximately three-quarters of a mile south of the crowd.

The Quasi and ostensibly her two-man crew and two

passengers slammed the beach perfectly perpendicular at near the speed of sound. The first impression of the shocked-to-silence crowd had to be the same as Buck's. The screaming jet engines still resonated even after the plane disintegrated, hidden in a billowing globe of angry black-and-orange flames. An eerie silence swept in, followed less than half a second later by the nauseating sound of the impact, a thundering explosion accompanied by the roar and hiss of the raging fire.

Buck hurried to his car and phoned Rayford. "The ship is down on the shore. No one could have survived it. On my way back to the voice that will cry in the wilderness."

Buck was struck by an unusual emotion as he merged into traffic that crawled toward the ancient city. It was as if he had seen his comrades go down in that plane. He knew it was empty, yet there had been such a dramatic finality to the ruse. He wished he knew whether it was the end of something or the beginning of something. Could he hope the GC was too busy to thoroughly investigate the site? Fat chance.

All Buck knew was that what he had endured in three and a half years was a walk in the park compared to what was coming. The entire drive back he spent in silent prayer for every loved one and Trib Force member. Buck had little doubt that the indwelt Antichrist would not hesitate to use his every resource to quash the rebellion scheduled to rise against him the next day.

Buck had never been fearful, never one to back down in the face of mortal danger. But Nicolae Carpathia was

evil personified, and the next day Buck would be in the line of fire when the battle of the ages between good and evil for the very souls of men and women would burst from the heavens, and all hell would break loose on earth.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Revelation 16:1-2

O N E

RAYFORD STEELE slept fitfully and awoke tangled in a prickly woolen blanket, knees drawn to his chest and fists balled under his chin. He bolted from the cot and peered out of his tiny makeshift quarters near Mizpe Ramon in the Negev Desert.

The sun cast an eerie, orange glow, but it would soon grow harsh and yellow, shimmering off rock and sand. The thermometer would exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit by noon—another typical day in the United Carpathian States.

Engaged in the riskiest endeavor of his life, Rayford had cast his lot with God and the miracle of technology. There was no hiding a jury-rigged airstrip on the desert floor—not from the stratospheric cameras of the Global Community. Ridiculously vulnerable, Rayford and his ragtag team of flying rebels—having arrived by the dozens

from around the globe—were at the mercy of the most audacious ruse imaginable.

His comrade in the enemy's lair had planted evidence in the Global Community database that the massive effort at Mizpe Ramon was an exercise of the GC's. As long as GC Security and Intelligence personnel bought the great "lie in the sky," Rayford and his extended Tribulation Force would continue what he called Operation Eagle. The name was inspired by the prophecy in Revelation 12:14: "The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."

Dr. Tsion Ben-Judah, spiritual mentor of the Tribulation Force, taught that the "woman" represented God's chosen people; the "two wings," land and air; "her place," Petra—the city of stone; "a time," one year—thus "a time and times and half a time" to be three and a half years; and the "serpent," Antichrist.

The Tribulation Force believed that Antichrist and his minions were about to attack Israeli Christ-followers and that, when they fled, Rayford and his recruited fellow believers would serve as agents of rescue.

He dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts and went looking for Albie, his second-in-command. The helpers, rallied via the Internet by Rayford's daughter, Chloe, from the safe house in Chicago, had only recently finished the landing strip. They had alternated shifts; some were instructed in flight plans by the same personnel who had checked them in and verified the mark of the believer on

their foreheads, while others ran heavy equipment or toiled as laborers.

"Here, Chief," Albie said, as Rayford took in the row after row of helicopters, jets, and even the occasional prop plane lining the far side of the strip. "First mission accomplished."

The small, dark, former black marketer, nicknamed after his home city of Al Basrah, wore his bogus GC deputy commander uniform and had in tow a large young man who, Rayford was not surprised to learn, was from California.

"George Sebastian," the tall, thick blond said, extending a powerful hand.

"Rayf—"

"Oh, I know who you are, sir," George said. "Pretty sure everybody here does."

"Let's hope nobody outside here does," Rayford said. "So you're Albie's choice for chopper lead."

"Well, he, uh, asked that I refer to him as Commander Elbaz, but yes, sir."

"What do we like about him?" Rayford asked Albie.

"Experienced. Smart. Knows how to handle a bird."

"Fine by me. Wish I had time to socialize, George, but—"

"If you have just another minute, Captain Steele . . ."

Rayford glanced at his watch. "Walk with us, George."

They headed to the south end of the new airstrip, Rayford's eyes and ears alert for unfriendly skies. "I'll make it quick, sir. It's just that I like to tell people how it happened with me."

“It?”

“You know, sir.”

Rayford loved these stories, but there was a time and place for everything, and this was neither.

“Nothing dramatic, Captain. Had a chopper instructor, Jeremy Murphy, who always told me Jesus was coming to take Christians to heaven. ’Course, I thought he was a nutcase, and I even got him in trouble for proselytizing on the job. But he wouldn’t quit. He was a good instructor, but I didn’t want a thing to do with the other stuff. I was loving life—newly married, you know.”

“Sure.”

“He invited me to church and everything. I never went. Then the big day happens. Millions missing everywhere. Smart as I’m supposed to be, I actually tried calling him to see if my session was called off that day ’cause of all the chaos and everything. Later that night somebody found his clothes on a chair in front of his TV.”

Rayford stopped and studied George. He would have enjoyed hearing more, but the clock was ticking. “Didn’t take you long after that, did it?”

George shook his head. “I went cold. I felt so lucky I hadn’t been killed. I prayed, I mean right then, that I would remember the name of his church. And I did, but hardly anybody was there. Anyway, I found somebody who knew what was going on, they reminded me what Murphy had been telling me, and they prayed with me. I’ve been a believer ever since. My wife too.”

“My story’s almost the same,” Rayford said, “and maybe one of these days I’ll have time to tell you. But—”

“Sir,” the young man said, “I need another second.”

“I don’t want to be rude, son, but—”

“You need to hear him out, Cap,” Albie said.

Rayford sighed.

George pointed to the other end of the airstrip. “I brought samples of the cargo that’s followin’ me, soon as the strip can handle a transport.”

“Cargo?”

“Weapons.”

“Not in the market.”

“These are free, sir.”

“Still—”

“Our base trained for combat,” George said. “When Carpathia told the nations to destroy 90 percent of their weapons and send the other 10 percent to him, you can imagine how that went over.”

“The U.S. was the largest contributor,” Rayford said.

“But I’ll bet we also held on to more.”

“What’ve you got?”

“Probably more than you need. Want to see the samples?”

David Hassid sat in the front passenger seat of the rented van with his solar-powered laptop. Leah Rose was driving. Behind her, Hannah Palemoon sat next to Mac McCullum, while Abdullah Smith lay on his back across the third seat. They had spent the night hidden behind a rock outcropping a mile and a half off the main road,

midway between Resurrection Airport in Amman, Jordan, and Mizpe Ramon. The last thing they wanted was to lead the GC to Operation Eagle.

David found on the Net that he, Hannah, Mac, and Abdullah were still presumed dead from the airplane crash in Tel Aviv the day before, but Security and Intelligence personnel were combing the wreckage. "How soon before they realize we're at large?" Hannah said.

Mac shook his head. "I hope they assume we'd a been vaporized in a deal like that. Pray they find small bits of shoes or somethin' they decide is clothing material."

"I can't raise Chang," David said, angrier than he let on.

"I imagine the boy's busy," Mac said.

"Not for this long. He knows I need to be sure he's all right."

"Worryin' gets us nowhere," Mac said. "Look at Smitty."

David turned in his seat. Abdullah slept soundly. Hannah and Leah had hit it off and were planning a mobile first-aid center at the airstrip. "We all fly back to the States when the operation is over," Leah said.

"Not me," David said, and he felt the eyes of the others. "I'm going to Petra before anybody else even gets there. That place is going to need a tech center, and Chang and I have already put a satellite in geosynchronous orbit above it."

His phone chirped, and he dug it from his belt. "Hey," he heard. "You know where I am, because I'm on schedule."