

SNEAK PREVIEW



SOON

THE  
BEGINNING  
OF THE  
END

•  
A NOVEL

JERRY  
JENKINS

*#1 New York Times Best-Selling Author  
of the Left Behind® Series*



S O O N

A NOVEL

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END

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JERRY JENKINS

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TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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“Imagine...

no religion too.”

**JOHN LENNON**

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*From letters to TIME magazine*

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“...ban all these religions, cults, and man-made concepts of how to worship God. Bar the different religious leaders from spreading their views as the only absolute... Forbid religions, and there will be fewer fights.”

JORMA KAJASTE  
*Espoo, Finland*

“If there were no religions, and only empathy, altruism, and humanism to lead the way, the world would truly be an enlightened place.”

PREETI KUMAR  
*Harlington, England*

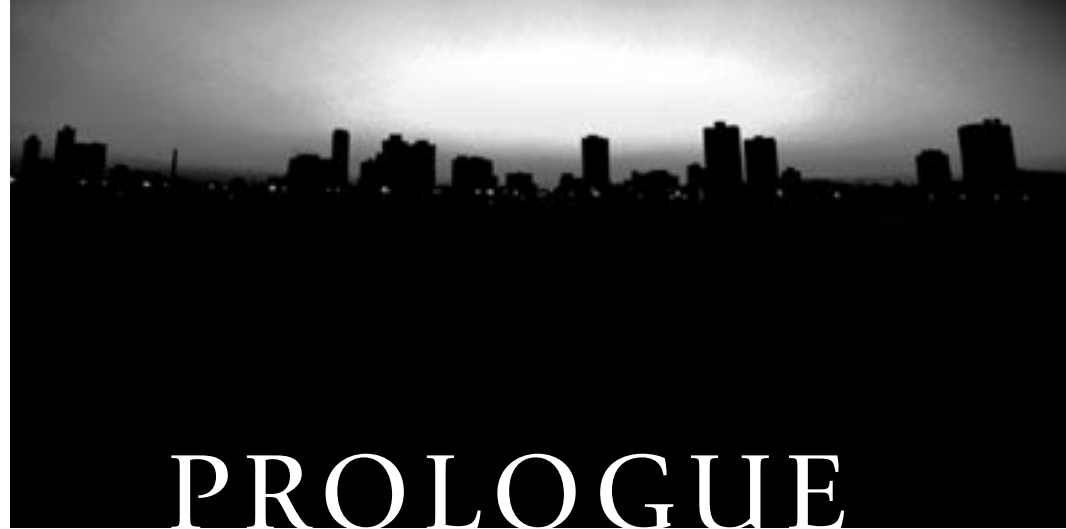
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**AT THE CONCLUSION OF WORLD WAR**

**3 IN THE FALL OF 2006**, it was determined by the new international government in Bern, Switzerland, that beginning January 1 of the following year, the designation A.D. (*anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord, or after the birth of Christ), would be replaced by P.3. (post-World War 3). Thus, January 1, 2007 A.D. would become January 1, 1 P.3.

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# PROLOGUE

11:05 P.M., EASTERN STANDARD TIME

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 36 P.3.

BRIGHTWOOD PARK, WASHINGTON, D.C.,  
CAPITAL OF THE COLUMBIA REGION  
UNITED SEVEN STATES OF AMERICA

**A COMMON CITIZEN** would not have recognized the danger. But the lone occupant of the Chevy Electrolumina was retired Delta Force Command Sergeant Major Andrew Pass.

He touched the tip of his right thumb to the tip of his pinkie, activating cells implanted in his molars. He could have dialed with his other fingertips, but he opted for voice-recognition and quickly recited the numbers that would connect him on a secure, private circuit to his brother in the underground compound.

"This is Jack, Andy," came the answer that resonated off his cheekbones and directly to his eardrum. "GPS shows you heading north on Sixteenth toward Silver Spring."

"Roger that. My ETA was 11:15—"

"Was?"

"Yeah, I—"

"Say no more. I see 'em. What kinda rig, Andy?"

"Looks like an Extended Suburban Hydro. They're onto me."

"You sure?"

"And I'm unarmed, Jack."

"Can you lose 'em?"

"Snow's deep and packed, but I have to try."

"What do you need?"

"Just wanted you to get hold of Angela in case I can't."

"No fatalism now, Andy. Come on."

"If I don't see you in ten minutes, spread the word."

Andy pressed his pinkie and thumb tips together again and peeked in the rearview mirror. Smooth. The hydrogen-powered Suburban was hanging back almost three blocks. By now they had to know that he knew. Clearly they weren't going to blow this by being overeager.

He thought about calling his daughter himself, but he had to concentrate. Jack would know how to break it to her.

Andy took a right and then a left, dousing his lights. That wouldn't shake the Suburban, and with its colossal power pack, it could run him down in seconds, even in this weather. For the moment he was out of his pursuers' line of vision. Andy reached deep into his pocket and pulled out the flat, smooth, white stone that told those he wanted to know that he was one of them. He lowered his window a few inches and tossed it into the frigid night. He was going to have to ditch the Chevy too.

He wheeled into an alley, eyes peeled for a spot to hide the small car. Nothing. He leaped out and sprinted three blocks through icy flurries, darting in and out of shadows, keeping to alleyways. He was grateful his daily jog and workout afforded him such conditioning at fifty-five. But he chastised himself for leaving the compound without a weapon.

It had been months since Andy had even a close call, but

that was no excuse for laxity. If only he could distance himself enough from the Suburban, he could get Jack to have someone pick him up in a fresh, unsuspected car.

Another black Suburban whooshed past ahead of him and slid to a stop. Andy heard doors slamming and boots crunching. He whirled to head back out the way he came, but the original tailing Hydro roared up behind him. Andy slipped but stayed upright as he quickly moved left to use a window ledge, hoping to hoist himself atop a one-story building. Too late. His pursuers had filled the alley, and he faced the barrels of high-powered weapons.

A rawboned woman with a shock of silver hair stepped forward, thin-lipped. "Andrew Pass?"

He would not respond.

Another uniform, a young man, patted him down. The amount of vapor rushing from his mouth told Andy the kid was excited. "Unarmed." He cuffed Andy behind his back, the steel cold on his wrists. "I'll wand him."

Oh, no.

He ran a detector over Andy's limbs, stopping when a high tone signaled an ID biochip beneath the skin of his right forearm. The young man studied an LED readout. "It's Pass, all right."

Silver Hair waved the rest of the uniforms into position. They guided Andy to a windowless truck and boosted him into the back. When the door was shut, Andy lowered himself to the floor. With his hands behind him he couldn't keep from pitching and rolling, banging into the door as the truck took off.

Would his family or his compatriots have a clue what became of him? Could he escape? He had to try. He had to do something.

Andy judged the ride at between ten and fifteen minutes, at a speed that sent him bashing from wall to wall. When the truck

finally skidded to a stop, he wrenched himself into a sitting position by planting one foot and pressing his shoulder against the side of the truck. The doors opened and he was yanked to the ground.

Guards hustled Andy toward a building in a run down industrial park. The woman in charge nodded to an underling who directed one of the Suburbans to park by the front door. Two men pulled a fifty-five-gallon drum from the back of the vehicle and awkwardly rolled it into the building. As others shoved Andy through the door and into a cavernous room, the two pried the perforated lid off the drum. It clanged to the floor.

Andy closed his eyes and drew in a long breath, acrid fumes attacking his nostrils. Fear flared in him. He had imagined such a moment. He prayed he would remain stoic.

The woman loomed over Andy, her eyes as silvery as her hair. Psycho eyes.

She moved closer and bent toward Andy's ear, her breath hot and wet. "Recognize those fumes, Major?"

Andy glared, pulse raging, determined to stay silent. Surrender wasn't in his nature. A flying kick could topple this witch. A lowered shoulder and a head butt might take out one or two more. But the odds were ludicrous. Was he willing to die their way or with bullets in his back? Time was running out.

"Actions have consequences, Andy," the woman said. "Now others will get the message. The USSA does not tolerate subversives."

Andy wanted to spit in her face. Stay silent. Strong. His mind reeled. Torture? Death? He'd risked death on the battlefield but had never faced such personal horror. Was his faith strong enough?

"Here's your chance at bona fide martyrdom, Andy. Sainthood."

So this was it then? Ignominious death without a fight?

Andy had been taught that courage was not fearlessness but rather the management of fear. He wasn't managing well. *I'm actually going to die.*

Two enforcers lifted him over the barrel, lined with napalm. As they lowered him he tried to kick, but his heels caught the rim of the drum as his hands and back slid into three inches of the surprisingly cool, jellified gasoline. One of the uniformed men jammed Andy's feet into the drum. There he sat, pinned—feet above his head, chin pressed so tight to his chest that he could barely breathe.

The woman barked a command, and someone pressed the lid down over the barrel, sealing Andy in. Dim light peeked through the holes. None of his training had cured Andy's claustrophobia. His breath came in great rushes through clenched teeth.

"Stand back ten feet, gentlemen."

The strike of a match. The tiny flame dropping into the barrel. The explosion of fumes. Andy willed himself to make no sound, but he failed. He had drawn in enough air to fill his lungs just before the conflagration enveloped him with a heat so hellish he could not fathom it. And he exhaled with a scream so piercing he could hear it above the roar of the fire.

He screamed as long as he could, knowing his next breath would draw in the flames and fuel for which his body had become a mere wick. Insane from the pain and unable to move, Andy finally sucked in the killing breath, the merciful, final invasion that roasted his lungs and heart and transported him from one world to the next.



**WASHINGTON, D.C. STILL KNEW** how to do holidays. Though the city was now merely one of seven capitals of the United Seven States of America, at times like this it harkened back to its glory days and reminded old-timers of the turn of the century, before the war changed everything—including the calendar.

Dense snowfall didn't slow traffic or seem to dampen spirits this December 24th—Wintermas Eve—of 36 P.3. Lights bedecked the monuments, those that had survived the war or been erected since. Only the war memorials remained dark. While military heroes were acknowledged with appropriate burials, war itself had not been commemorated for more than thirty-five years.

The main thoroughfares of the historic city sparkled with blinking white lights that washed the trees with cheer. The west wing, all that was left of the White House, shone through the

splatty downfall. And behind it the Columbia Region's Wintermas tree illuminated the lawn. Santas dotted street corners, ringing bells and thanking passersby for donations, but not to the Salvation Army, for neither salvation nor army remained *de rigueur*. The money would go to international humanitarian relief.

On a tony, tree-lined street in old Georgetown sat a row of nearly identical three-story brownstones. In the driveway of one on a corner, snow slid off the steaming hood of a rented Ford Arc, and its electro power pack began to cool. Fresh footprints—two adults and two children—led to the front door. While there were no outside decorations, the den window boasted a gleaming Wintermas tree.

Inside that den, Dr. Paul Stepola and his young family from Chicago awkwardly settled in with his wife Jae's parents, the former Army Lieutenant General Ranold B. Decenti and his wife, Margaret.

This was the tenth straight Wintermas Eve the Stepolas had visited the Decentis, yet Paul felt no more comfortable or welcome than he had when he and Jae were newlyweds. The four adults had greeted each other with handshakes. Daughter Brie, seven, and son Connor, five, were formally acknowledged.

Paul had never settled on how to address his father-in-law. He had tried Dad, General, Ranold, and even the retired seventy-five-year-old's last title, Deputy Director (of the National Peace Organization, for which Paul also worked). This year Paul called the man Sir and lied that it was wonderful to see him again.

Margaret Decenti might as well have been invisible. She smiled occasionally but rarely spoke. Her lot in life, it appeared to Paul, was to do her husband's bidding. This she did largely with a blank expression. Occasionally she would ask Jae to tell the kids to stop doing one thing or another.

Complicating this year's festivities for Paul was that Jae was

again on his case about working too much, spending too much time on the road, not caring enough about her and the kids. The truth was, he knew, she still didn't trust him. His indiscretion—which she forced him to call what it was: an affair—started and ended more than six years before. He had behaved himself since, but no amount of talk persuaded her. The job was again taking over his life, but it seemed to Paul that Jae suspected something else going on. He used to love to merely gaze at her. Now he hardly wanted to be in the same room.

They had met in graduate school at the University of the District of Columbia in 22 P.3., just after Paul had left the army's top secret elite counterterrorist strike unit, Delta Force. He had joined the army to honor his father, who had been killed in World War 3 when Paul was an infant. Despite his obvious proclivity for it, the military wasn't much of a career, since there was little armed conflict in the world anymore. So Paul chose to pursue a doctorate in religious studies, with the encouragement of his mother.

She had convinced him that every war stemmed from the fairy tales of religious extremists and that the most rewarding career he could choose would be one in which he helped maintain an intellectual, humanistic society that eschewed both religion and war. "Study the major religions," she'd say again and again, "and you'll see. You'll find out what makes people follow despots like sheep. Study history or be doomed to repeat it."

It seemed everything Paul read of religion bore out his mother's belief. His religious studies program was a virtual military history course, especially when it came to World War 3. It had been sparked by the Muslim holy war against Jews and the West, which began with the American World Trade Center attacks in 2001. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to an escalation of the Israel versus Palestine conflict, prompting devastating terrorist attacks in the nations that tried to quell it—both

in North America and Europe—in 2005. Meanwhile, Catholics and Protestants continued to war in Northern Ireland, culminating in the destruction of major landmarks in London; the Balkans exploded with the mutual persecutions of the Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox Serbs; Hindus and Muslims battled over Kashmir; and various Asian religious factions skirmished. Soon the globe was ablaze with attacks, counterattacks, reprisals, and finally, all-out nuclear war that most thought signaled the end of the world.

Jae had been a local girl studying economics, and Paul's immediate attraction was mutual. She was tall and lithe, a celebration for the eyes. He—she said—would easily pass muster with her father, a retired Army general, then a big shot with the NPO. They married in 26 P.3., right after grad school.

Paul dreamed of a corporate job, but when his PhD in religious studies didn't open those doors, Jae urged him to pursue the NPO. The National Peace Organization had risen from the ashes of the FBI and the CIA after World War 3. Like the CIA, it was a foreign intelligence force, though a skeletal one, since in the postwar world, the United Nations oversaw global peacekeeping; and like the FBI, it handled interstate crimes—which, these days, were just as likely to be international—such as fraud, racketeering, terrorism, and drug trafficking.

Paul trained at Langley, then spent his first few years in Chicago on the racketeering squad, where, surprisingly, his graduate work found purchase. Studying the world's major religions introduced him to a broad range of cultures, background that proved invaluable when investigations drew him or his colleagues overseas. Now he did much of his work abroad, on one of the consulting teams that the NPO hired out to help other governments train their own peacekeeping and intelligence forces.

Ranold Decenti seemed to view Paul's work as a cushy desk

job. Paul never felt put down in so many words, but his father-in-law's tone and demeanor were condescending. Ranold clearly considered the days when he was Deputy Director, helping run the massive agency from its headquarters in Washington, as its Golden Age. "You know, in my time, young guys joined the agency for the action, not to teach and consult. And no one wanted to get stuck in some regional capital. The best and the brightest came to Washington."

"Well," Paul said, "maybe that made sense when it was capital of the country. Nobody listens to Washington."

"Tell me about it. Now, instead of visionary leadership, a National Director baby-sits a bunch of Bureau chiefs who all set their own agendas."

"Task forces work across regional lines."

"Yeah, but—"

The kids burst in, trailed by Jae, now in their pajamas and begging to know whether Wintermas presents might be opened that night instead of the next day. Margaret expelled a huge sigh.

Ranold gave her a look that could have stopped the snow. "No!"

He growled with such menace that Brie moved away, but Connor kept staring at the Wintermas tree. "Why do you have a flag on top of your tree, Grandpa? Jimmy—he's my friend—his mom says when she was little, people put stars or angels on top of their trees. She's still got some."

Ranold waved dismissively. "Not in this house. And not in yours either, I hope."

"Of course not," Paul said.

Connor climbed into Paul's lap and wrapped his arms around his neck. Paul sensed the boy's fatigue. "Why not, Dad?"

"We'll talk about it in the morning," Paul said. "Now why don't you and your sister—"

"But why not? They sound pretty, like they'd look better on a Wintermas tree than an old flag."

Ranold stood and moved to the window with his back to them. "That flag stands for everything I believe in, Connor."

"He wasn't saying anything about the flag," Paul said. "He doesn't understand. He's just a—"

"He's old enough to be taught, Paul."

"It's never come up before, Ranold. I plan to tell him—"

"See that you do! And you ought to check into that mother who's harboring contraband icons."

Paul shook his head.

"What's wrong with angels and stars, Daddy?"

"I promise I'll tell you tomorrow."

"Tell him now, Paul!"

"Ranold, give it a rest. I'll decide when and how to educate my son. . . ."

Jae stood and nodded at Brie, taking Connor by the hand.

"Right now he's going to bed," she said.

"Tell him in bed then," her father said.

**JAE AVOIDED PAUL'S GAZE** as she led the children to the stairs. "Say good night to Grandpa and Grandma."

Both sing-songed a good-night. Margaret formally wished them the same. Ranold said, "Yeah, yeah."

*Great, Jae thought. Already Paul and Dad are sparring.*

When they were first married, Paul seemed to look up to her father, but there was always an undercurrent of competition. Paul had refused to join the NPO until Ranold retired and then asked to be assigned to Chicago, his hometown, to escape his father-in-law's shadow. To Jae it was an adventure to settle in a new city, and she was thrilled to land a job with the Chicago Board of Trade. Then the kids came along and she became a

stay-at-home mom. Now that they were in school, she missed the camaraderie of the office but didn't feel she could go back to work with Paul on the road so much. Even when he was home, he wasn't much of a companion—so distant and distracted that her old suspicions came flooding back. She had been looking forward to spending Wintermas in Washington as a break from those worries and from the stress of feeling like a single parent.

At the top of the stairs Paul caught up with her. "What?" he said.

"You know what. Getting Daddy all riled up. You know good and well what he lost because of a bunch of religious fanatics."

"All right, Jae. We'll discuss this later."

"A lot later. Once the kids are down I want you to make nice with Dad."

"How'm I supposed to do that? I'm not going to apologize, because I didn't—"

"I don't care what you do or how you do it, but get it smoothed over. Honestly, I don't know—"

"Jae, come on. He overreacted. Connor brought it up and—"

"And you ought to know by now how to steer clear of painful areas."

"I have painful areas too, you know."

Jae tucked in Brie. "Do you, Paul? Have you lost your entire army and the population of a whole state? Hawaii was a state then, you know."

Paul bent to embrace Connor, who turned away, appearing upset by the harsh tone of the conversation. "There were a lot of states then, Jae."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

They closed the kids' door and stopped in the hall. "Just that it's not like losing a whole region would be now. I don't know. I'm not making sense. Just ignore me."

“Will you please just go back down there? Maybe you enjoy fighting with my father, but I’m not going to let you ruin our holiday.”

**TRUDGING DOWN TO THE DEN** was like being sent to the principal’s office. Paul knew that nothing upset his father-in-law more than religion. Ranold had been commander of the U.S. Pacific Army during the war. He was on his way back from Washington to his headquarters at Fort Shafter, north of Honolulu, when disaster struck. Warring between Asian religious factions in the South China Sea resulted in the launching of two nuclear warheads. A colossal chunk of southern China, including Kowloon, was literally severed from the rest of the continent. Besides the devastation of the bombs themselves, which snuffed out tens of millions of lives, the violence to the topography caused a tsunami of such magnitude that it engulfed all of Hong Kong Island, swamped Taiwan with hundreds of feet of water, raced to the Philippine Sea and the East China Sea, obliterated Japan, swept into the Northwest Pacific Basin and the Japan Trench, finally reaching the North Pacific Current.

It was upon the whole of the Hawaiian Islands before any evacuation could take place, swallowing the entire state. Not one person in all of Hawaii survived. The great tidal wave eventually reached southern California and Baja California, reaching farther inland than expected and killing thousands more who had to believe they had fled far enough. It changed the landscape and the history of millions of acres from the Pacific Rim to what was then known as North America. The global map would never look the same, and decades later the grief still lingered at the human toll.

A million times more destructive than the atomic bombs

that had brought an end to the previous “war to end all wars,” the killer tsunami seemed to sober every extremist on the globe. It was as if, overnight, every nation lost its appetite for conflict.

Antireligious, antiwar factions toppled nearly every head of state, and an international government rose from the ashes and mud. The United States was redrawn to consist of seven regions:

Atlantica in the Northeast encompassed ten former states with New York City as its capital.

Columbia encompassed nine southeastern states, with Washington, D.C., as its capital. The president of the United States was deposed and the vicepresident installed as regional governor, reporting to the international government in Switzerland.

Gulfland took in Texas and five nearby states, with Houston its capital.

Sunterra was comprised of Southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico, with Los Angeles becoming its capital.

Rockland was made up of seven states, and Las Vegas became its capital.

Pacifica, with its capital in San Francisco, encompassed Northern California and four northwestern states.

And Chicago became the capital of Heartland, which took in ten Midwestern states.

Paul’s own father had died earlier in the war, when the Coalition of Muslim Nations attacked Washington, D.C. Ranold’s loss isn’t the only one that matters. His whole generation is still focused on the horrors they saw. We’re never allowed to forget how they suffered so we could enjoy a lifetime of peace.

Paul was soon flooded with shame. Early in the twenty-first century the world had been uglier than he could conceive and the devastating war had left scars—personal and global, physical

and psychic—that would never be healed. He had been foolish to let his father-in-law provoke him. He hated the old man’s self-righteousness, but maybe he could cut Ranold some slack.

When he reached the den, however, neither host nor hostess was still there. Paul glanced at his watch. Eleven straight up. He turned on the big-screen TV and settled in a chair.

“Local police report tonight the grisly discovery of the charred remains of a decorated military man, apparently the result of a tragic accident. The body of retired Delta Force Command Sergeant Major Andrew Edward Pass was found among the ruins of an abandoned warehouse just north of the Columbia Zoological Park.”

Paul stood, mouth agape, holding his breath. Andy? Andy Pass?

“Police spokespersons say they have not determined any reason Major Pass would have been in the building, but they have ruled out arson. The fire has been traced to an electrical short, and police speculate that Pass may have seen the fire and attempted to put it out. Pass reportedly has been involved in community service since his retirement from the military five years ago. Full honor guard funeral services are set for Arlington Regional Cemetery at 10 A.M., Saturday, December 27.”

Paul blinked back tears as he crossed the room to his father-in-law’s bar. He poured two fingers of Scotch, squinted at it, then added two more. Ranold entered in robe and slippers. “No ice, Paul?”

“No, thanks.”

“My, my. A little strong for you, no?”

“I just found out my Delta Force commanding officer is dead. He was like a father to me, and—”

“Pass?”

“You know?”

“I still have friends in the agency.”

“But the cops just found him. They—”

“Don’t believe everything you hear, Paul. And good ride-dance, I say.”

“Hold on, Ranold. He was the finest—”

“Son, when was the last time you heard from Pass?”

“When he retired, I guess—”

“So you don’t have a clue what he’s been into since you were his protégé at Fort Monroe.”

“Well, no, but—”

“Well, I do.” Ranold gestured to a chair and both sat. “NPO, okay? Given the new directives for the agency, you need to know this stuff.”

“I’m listening.”

“They’re keeping it out of the news, but—”

“Nothing illegal, Ranold. Andy Pass would never—”

“You want to hear this or don’t you? Andrew Pass headed an underground religious cell right here in D.C. Brightwood Park.”

“What faction?”

“Christians.”

“I can’t believe that.”

“Believe what you want. You want to keep him on some patriotic pedestal? Fine. Live in your dream world. We’ve got to throttle these small cells so they don’t become big ones. You lop off the head and the tail soon dies.”

“Lop off the head? NPO eliminated him?”

“And with good reason, Paul. Let Andrew Pass serve as an example to other subversives.”

**PAUL’S HEAD WAS SPINNING.** No way could Andy Pass be a subversive, religious or otherwise. Ranold’s information had to be faulty. Being in the cloak-and-dagger game all those years must have made the man conspiracy buggy.

# SOON

THE BEGINNING OF THE END  
STREET DATE 09.16.03

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He is also the owner of Jenkins Entertainment (a film company in Los Angeles) and the Christian Writers Guild ([www.ChristianWritersGuild.com](http://www.ChristianWritersGuild.com)). Jerry and his wife, Dianna, live in Colorado and have three grown sons and two grandchildren.

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