

COMPETING FICTIONS: THE USES OF CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY
IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR FICTIONAL WORKS

PART ONE: PREMILLENNIALIST APOCALYPTIC FICTIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Two forms of fiction using Christian apocalyptic imagery have recently entered mainstream popular culture. The first form I will refer to as premillennialist apocalyptic fiction. This form is usually in the style of the contemporary political thriller or techno-thriller. Its essence is that follows the outlines of the modern premillennialist “rooster”¹ script as first popularized by *The Late Great Planet Earth*,² typically with more attention to prophetic detail than *The Omen* and other earlier fictional (often horror) works.³ The second form, which I will refer to as anti-apocalyptic fiction, has emerged from various precedents in the science fiction and fantasy genres and uses Christian apocalyptic imagery to question the fundamentals of the premillennialist vision.

The emergence of these forms is indicative of changes within society and publishing affecting the receptiveness to millennial themes in fiction and changes in millennial concerns as we approached the years 2000-2001. The contrasts among these forms and the interpretive works that spawned them illustrate the broader structural distinctions among the varieties of theological and fictional (specifically science fiction/fantasy and political or techno-thriller) modes of discourse. Both forms have the potential either to mitigate millennial tension or, in their more extreme forms and in confrontation with each other, to heighten such tension.

¹ Term taken from the Center for Millennial Studies lexicon. See www.mille.org/welcome/logo.html.

² Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1970).

³ The big-screen *Omen* films are listed at the end of the paper. A book and a TV movie carried the saga further. The third of the *Omen* films, *The Final Conflict*, like many other horror films, also incongruously makes Catholic clergy the heroes in a premillennialist structure. See Gordon McGill, *The Final Conflict* (New York: Signet, 1980).

Recent examples of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction include the *Left Behind* series and novels by Hal Lindsey and Pat Robertson. Apocalyptic fiction using Christian imagery almost by definition follows certain Christian assumptions, regardless of whether the target audience is premillennialist or even Christian. The desirability of assisting Good in the ultimate destruction of Evil and the relinquishing of human destiny to the Good are typically not questioned. Questioning these assumptions is in itself regarded as blasphemous (not only by premillennialists), and therefore risky for publishers, filmmakers etc. who want to reach a mass audience.

It is therefore surprising that in various current popular fictional representations of the apocalypse using Christian imagery and scenarios and accepting certain Christian (even premillennialist evangelical Christian) premises there has emerged a different pattern. Instead of depicting the horror of the (temporary) triumph of evil or the ecstasy of the millennial aftermath, these “anti-rooster” representations stress the undesirability and avoidability of the apocalyptic conflict from a human perspective, and oppose (usually with success) human interests against both angelic and demonic plans for such a conflict. Some had cloaked this pattern in allegory, while others have been quite explicit.

I have divided consideration of these new fictional genre forms into two parts, each a self-contained paper. This first part outlines a number of examples of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction and describes the usual conventions and recurring themes and patterns of such fiction. We will consider why the move to fiction by premillennialist authors has been made in recent years, and how the fictionalization of the premillennialist script changes that script, both strengthening and undermining its

rhetorical effectiveness.⁴ Part Two⁵ (also published in this issue of the *Journal of Millennial Studies*) describes the anti-apocalyptic works that have recently emerged.

II. FORMATION OF A GENRE

A. Why Premillennialist Fiction?

Although apocalyptic fiction is far from new,⁶ works of fiction which more or less strictly track the premillennialist dispensational interpretations of biblical prophecy have exploded in number and popularity in recent years.⁷ In a 1993 analysis of evangelical culture, such works do not even merit a mention, while other genres such as the Christian romance novel are given detailed treatment.⁸ Given the current popularity of such apocalyptic fiction, it is difficult at first to see why the new authors and their

⁴ See Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) for an examination of apocalypse as rhetoric, which along with his rhetorical categories (*e.g.*, tragic versus comic apocalyptic rhetoric) has been extremely helpful for the analysis in Parts One and Two of my paper.

⁵ Thomas M. Doyle, *Competing Fictions: The Uses of Christian Apocalyptic Imagery in Contemporary Popular Fictional Works. Part Two: Anti-Apocalyptic Fictions.*

⁶ Indeed, some post-modern theorists such as Jacques Derrida would go so far as to say that fiction is inherently apocalyptic.

⁷ I distinguish these premillennialist works from “new Messiah” works; that is, modern recapitulations of the messiah story, which have a longer history than the modern premillennialist apocalyptic novel. These more allegorical works often use the Second Coming as a device to explore the role of the divine and our reactions to it in contemporary society, but such works often lacked a truly apocalyptic scale of conflict. Examples include Glenn Kleier’s *The Last Day* (New York: Warner Books, 1997), Charles Sailor’s *Second Son* (New York: Avon, 1979) and Edwin Black’s *Format C* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Brookline Books, 1999). Such New Agish works may well find a popular, even Christian audience, but they do not comport with premillennialist beliefs and premillennialists would even likely disapprove of their doctrinal bases.

⁸ Erling Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America: The Evangelical Voice* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 137-47. The Christian romance genre has a longer history in Christian book publishing, emerging in the 1970s. See Jorstad, *Popular Religion in*

publishers, who often have had considerable experience writing and editing nonfictional interpretive works, waited so long to make the move to fiction. After all, *The Late Great Planet Earth* script was published in 1970.

The Christian romance novel, and later the contemporary spiritual warfare fantasy,⁹ had previously overcome many, but not all, of the concerns of evangelical editors with the possibilities of fictional works within Christian publishing.¹⁰ With nonfictional prophecy interpretation as another mainstay of Christian publishing, fictional works based on such interpretations would appear natural. But other than such noteworthy exceptions as the *Thief in the Night* film series¹¹ (itself not a conventionally distributed or viewed work), this fictional potential remained by and large untapped until the 1990s.

Apparently, there were other inhibitions in writing and publishing premillennialist apocalyptic fiction. The new authors of apocalyptic fiction themselves frequently feel compelled to justify the move to fiction, which speaks to the novelty of the form and their inhibition in pursuing it. Larry Burkett, author of a secular apocalyptic nonfiction book, *The Coming Economic Earthquake*, was quite tentative in his

America, 142-43. Its influence is felt in the Harlequin-style romances that are the frequent B-stories in apocalyptic fiction plots, as discussed below.

⁹ The success of the spiritual warfare genre also predated that of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction. See Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America*, 143-145.

¹⁰ See Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America*, 142.

¹¹ Other exceptions include Salem Kirban, *666* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970) (reprinted in 1998); Carol Balizet, *The Seven Last Years* (New York: Bantam, 1980); and Dan Betzer, *Beast: A Novel of the Future World Dictator* (Lafayette, LA: Prescott Press, 1985) (from a list in Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 271 n.84).

acknowledgements to *The Illuminati*, one of the first of the new wave of premillennialist apocalyptic novels.

Obviously this is a book unlike any I have ever written before. Prior to *The Illuminati* I had written nonfiction only. It is my sincere desire, as a fiction reader myself, that good, non-offensive fiction be made available to the public.¹²

As his book was one of the earliest of this wave, and as he was not trained as a biblical scholar, Burkett is anxious to mitigate the rhetorical impact of his novel.

My biggest concern in writing a novel is that someone may read too much into it. Obviously I tried to use as realistic a scenario as possible in this story. But it is purely fictional, including characters, events and timing. It should not be assumed that it is prophetic in any regard.¹³

Indeed, as discussed below, Burkett further mitigates the rhetorical impact of his novel by constructing a dress rehearsal for the true apocalypse rather than the apocalypse *per se*.

In later works, authors continue to apologize for the move to fiction, but take the opposite tact in reinforcing, rather than mitigating, the rhetorical impact of their fictional scenarios. In the introduction to his fictional book, *Blood Moon*, Hal Lindsey, easily the most widely read author of biblical prophecy interpretation gives justifications related to the power of the apocalyptic argument. First, he notes that, as widely disseminated as his nonfiction works are, “some people remain skeptical.”¹⁴ To help overcome this skepticism, he has turned to fiction as an aid to the imagination that offers

¹² Larry Burkett, *The Illuminati* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), Acknowledgements.

¹³ Larry Burkett, *The Illuminati*, Acknowledgements.

¹⁴ Hal Lindsey, *Blood Moon* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front Publishing, 1996), 2.

“just one hypothetical scenario”¹⁵ instead of the general outline of events. Finally, he notes that fiction allows an important change of focus.

In my non-fiction works, I have described how some of these “macro-events” might take place in our lifetime. But in the genre of fiction, I am able to tell the story through a series of “micro-events” – little stories about people struggling for survival and salvation through the most turbulent and tumultuous period in human history. The big story, then, is told through the eyes of these fictional characters.¹⁶

As a forward to the book *Apocalypse* by Peter and Paul Lalonde (a novelization of a direct-to-video movie), the well-known televangelist Jack Van Impe offers the following description of the fictional representation of biblical prophecy:

Make no mistake. This novel is indeed a work of fiction. But just barely. The fact that these events haven’t happened yet makes it fiction. But unlike other novels and stories you may read, something very unique can be said about *Apocalypse*. It is a book about the future based on Bible truths that will soon occur globally.¹⁷

The justification offered for the move to fiction is again the broader reach and power of the fictional argument:

And the best news of all is that this book is an absolutely great way to share the message of Bible Prophecy, and of the Lord’s soon return, with unsaved friends and loved ones. So if you know someone who needs to discover the truth of this incredible story, make sure you get and give them a copy of *Apocalypse*.¹⁸

Jerry B. Jenkins, co-author of the *Left Behind* series, the most popular religious apocalyptic books on the market today, has commented repeatedly on his particular gratification at the ability of the series to reach unbelievers and shore up the

¹⁵ Lindsey, *Blood Moon*, 3.

¹⁶ Lindsey, *Blood Moon*, 4.

¹⁷ Peter and Paul Lalonde, *Apocalypse: The Novel* (Niagara Falls, NY: This Week In Bible Prophecy, 1998), vii.

¹⁸ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, ix.

belief of others.¹⁹ From a cruder financial perspective, reaching a broader audience of course also means more sales.

Fiction has several other rhetorical advantages not consciously addressed by its authors. One is the ability to set dates without have to stand behind them, thereby generating apocalyptic expectation without commitment to a particular time frame. Another advantage is the ability to argue by implication instead of directly (*e.g.*, associating environmentalist arguments with the forces of the Antichrist without saying directly that environmentalism is evil). Overall, it may more effectively brings future events into present experience.

Yet for all the advantages, there was evident reluctance of some of these authors and their publishers to move the apocalyptic argument into fiction. The essential question for fundamentalists, despite Jesus' use of storytelling, is "If the Bible is to be read literally, why do we need mediators, particularly those who twist its words into fiction?"²⁰ A phone call in the summer of 1999 to Word Publishing, a subsidiary of Thomas Nelson publishers, regarding their fictional catalogue generated the response that they had nothing but the books listed in this paper's bibliography, since they specialized in "Christian books," not fiction, as if the two were inimical to each other.

Consciously or unconsciously, the authors may realize how, as discussed below, fiction changes the focus of the work in a way that undermines the fatalism of the nonfictional argument. But the most likely conscious reason for the authors' reluctance to move to fiction is that they perceive fiction is a less serious medium, and that it appears

¹⁹ On-line conference with Jerry B. Jenkins, Christian Interactive Network, June 28, 1999.

to compromise the claims to truth and underlying biblical certainty in the prophetic argument.

The authors deal with this embarrassment with the medium by insisting that their work is different from other fiction, like the made for TV movies that are “based on a true story.” Jack Van Impe instructs the reader in the forward to *Apocalypse* “And remember, it’s a true story – it just hasn’t happened yet.”²¹ The back cover to *Escape from Armageddon* notes that “All the facts come from God’s Word, not from the fantasies of man.”²² This “true fiction” further confuses the boundaries between speculation and fact that are thoroughly muddled in “nonfictional” biblical interpretation. The greater the artistic success, the greater the confusion. On the one hand, a character in *Left Behind* notes “Bible prophecy is history written in advance,”²³ but clearly it is not history even for believers at the level of detail experienced by a fictional character. On the other hand, the *Christ Clone* trilogy seemingly acknowledges the confusion by quoting Dickens at the beginning of the first volume: “Are these the shadows of things that will be, or are they the shadows of things that may be?”²⁴

Perhaps a major reason for delay was that a suitable genre of fiction had to be created and popularized for these authors to work within, and the basics of the premillennialist script had to be widely familiar and accepted by a least a core potential

²⁰ Douglas E. Winter, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, review of *Left Behind* and *Assassins*, in *Washington Post Book World*, Sept. 12, 1999: 9.

²¹ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, ix.

²² Ken and Val Walker, *Escape from Armageddon* (Glen Waverly, Victoria, Australia: Good News Australia, 1997). The book is viewable at www.vicnet.net.au/~gnaust.

²³ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 214.

²⁴ James BeauSeigneur, *In His Image* (Rockville, MD: SelectiveHouse, 1997).

audience. The fusion of the techno-thriller genre with the premillennialist end-time scenario proved to be an effective and often imitated vehicle for fictionalizing premillennialist apocalyptic arguments. To show why this fusion was effective, we should first turn to the story that premillennialists were concerned with telling.

B. The Premillennialist Script.

The currently most popular biblical end times scenario was first set forth for a broad audience in Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the greatest bestseller of 1970s, with sales of over 20 million by 1990.²⁵ "That book and its author spawned an entire industry devoted to pinning the events of the contemporary world to Scripture."²⁶ Other works, including works by Lindsey himself, have adjusted the scenario as world events have appeared to dictate. I have included as Appendix One a summary of the future events described in *The Late Great Planet Earth* and its brethren, since the fictional books discussed here all follow at least the broad outline of their biblical interpretation.

Not surprisingly, *The Late Great Planet Earth* and related nonfiction accounts emphasize the terrible nature of the Tribulation and the undesirability of being "left behind" to face it. The nonfiction accounts are also generally clear that nothing terribly dramatic happens prior to Rapture.²⁷ The Lindsey apocalypse is an unconditional apocalypse – he addresses groups, not individuals, in his scenarios, and the fate of each groups is certain.

²⁵ Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America*, 145.

²⁶ Philip Lamy, *Millennium Rage* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), 82.

One reason then for the delay in the move to fiction is that it changed these priorities. To create drama, individual characters, their individual choices and their conflicts must be addressed, often in a post-Rapture setting, mitigating the sense of fatalism that permeates the nonfiction. This broadens the reach of the rhetoric from the strictly proselytizing sphere to that of entertainment, but also lessens the mobilizing effect that such tragic apocalyptic rhetoric may have at its most fatalistic and frightening.

A further reason for the delay is that the popularization of the premillennialist script took time. It was only with the maturation of a generation already imbued with *The Late Great Planet Earth* (and later *A Thief in the Night*) scenario that apocalyptic fiction could enjoy the same sort of acceptance that science fiction has acquired. Earlier science fiction (for example, the first run of *Star Trek*) had to familiarize audiences with their gadgetry (*e.g.*, warp drive) and concepts (*e.g.*, interplanetary governments) and justify their plausibility; later science fiction assumes audience familiarity and comfort with these plot devices. Individual works may tweak the form of the warp drive in science fiction or the identity of the two witnesses in apocalyptic fiction, but the underlying base concepts remain. In laying the ground for premillennialist fiction, prophetic interpretation writers had successfully created a broadly recognized line of predicted events. Contemporaneously with the emergence of premillennialist fiction, these writers may have reached the limits of enthusiasm, both within and outside their core audience, for an explicitly argumentative approach that eschewed the usual forms of popular entertainment.

²⁷ Interestingly, Pat Robertson and some others differ from the view that the Rapture precedes the Tribulation, as discussed below. Their “post-trib” rapture position makes the

A further reason internal to the premillennialist script for the delay in moving to fiction is that such a move has only recently become more necessary. As noted above, a novel can set fictional dates for the end without having to stand behind them. The approach of year 2000 a dangerous period for nonfictional argument from a number of perspectives, especially date setting. Although nonfictional works since *The Late Great Planet Earth* have been good at hedging their bets on specific timetables and thus avoiding the embarrassment of the Millerites and others, no hedge is quite so effective as placing specific dates in the context of a fictional story. The heart of the apocalyptic argument – that the end is soon and evil is on the rise – is preserved, while the audience is nearly completely relieved of the expectation that the specific dates for the end will be met. Thus Pat Robertson could set a year 2000 date for the beginning of the Tribulation in his 1996 book, *The End of the Age*,²⁸ and yet not face questions regarding that date now that we are in that year.²⁹

Finally, the premillennialist script required a suitable existing fictional genre to adapt to its content. For the first Christian romances, that genre was the historical romance, which had been enjoying popularity among the general public.³⁰ So, what genre of fiction would be appropriate for a story about global political and military conflict and hidden conspiratorial evil?

problem of drama easier but has its own difficulties.

²⁸ Pat Robertson, *The End of the Age* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1995).

²⁹ However, the *Left Behind* books avoid specific date setting altogether.

³⁰ See Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America*, 142.

C. The Techno-Thriller or Political Thriller

The techno-thriller or political thriller differs from most of what is understood as science fiction in that it is usually set in the immediately proximate future. The date could always be today. Nothing new is needed for the events within to transpire starting now. As unrealistic as the scenarios within such work may be, its audience probably regards the genre as a whole as more realistic than science fiction or fantasy. The political or techno-thriller is ideologically conservative in a literal sense – no new ideas are needed for its events to occur. The gadgetry is the cutting edge of technology (hence “techno-”), but not requiring fundamental new discoveries. Nukes and advanced weaponry are always threatening, but their wielders are familiar enemies (neo- and old Nazis, Communists and terrorists). The genre is also ideologically conservative in the general sense – it is about “saving the world,” not, in contrast to much of self-understood science fiction, liberating it.³¹ The plot of these thrillers usually assumes the audience has some common background knowledge of past history and ongoing present events. The protagonists are typically intelligence agents, journalists, government workers caught in an unfolding global scale mystery/plot in which they have a larger than expected role to play in saving the world (by avoiding the apocalypse!). The protagonists must first convince themselves, then others, that a particular something is happening, which may

³¹ The dynamic between redemption and emancipation in apocalyptic science fiction will figure in Part Two’s analysis of anti-apocalyptic literature. See Frederick A. Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction: A Dialectic of Religious and Secular Soteriologies* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Amanda Loos, “*But That’s Crazy!*”: *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Recent Western Cinema* (Thesis: University of South Florida, 1999).

already be obvious to the reader. The novels of Tom Clancy are archetypical of this pattern.

The genre reached a peak during the Cold War years of the 1980s. The events of 1989 and thereafter (and secondarily, the passing of the World War II generation and with it plausible Nazi survivors) created a crisis for the techno-thriller genre, as well as American culture as a whole: who was going to be the enemy? In *Clear and Present Danger*,³² Clancy set the new tone. On the surface, the South American drug lords are the enemy, but the ultimate revelation is that the enemy is our own government. As another example among many, Grisham's conspiratorial *Pelican Brief*³³ also has the executive branch as the ultimate enemy. Conspiracy theory became a fertile source for the political thriller author.

For believers, premillennialist apocalyptic fiction theoretically offers a more effective replacement for the techno-thriller's enemy than drug lords or terrorists. The mindset for preparation for the end times is perhaps even more like the Cold War than is fighting drug lords or nuclear terrorists. As with the Cold War, being prepared for the biblical end times involves a constant state of readiness and local level conflicts in the expectation of an inevitable global final conflict with ultimate evil. But the inward turn of the techno-thriller towards internal conspiracy also meshes with the premillennialist expectation that the Antichrist may arise by stealth.

How well does premillennialist apocalyptic fiction fit into the techno- or political thriller pattern? A brief look at the better known titles shows that the characters

³² Tom Clancy, *Clear and Present Danger* (New York: Berkley, 1990).

³³ John Grisham, *The Pelican Brief* (New York: Dell, 1992).

are either journalists, computer people or military/government/intelligence personnel. They are seldom truly ordinary, but they would not normally be considered suited to the scale of the conflict that faces them. The plots focus on political developments in the standard theatres of the techno-thriller: Russia, the Middle East and the Washington corridors of power. The main protagonists must uncover (or perhaps “unveil”) the underlying biblical conflict, for purposes of saving the world in a religious sense, as the world is doomed in a physical one. An essential correspondence is that the timing could usually be today, regardless of what dates are actually used in the plot, and the gadgets and technologies (for example, the inevitable subcutaneous chip which constitutes the mark of the Beast in most of these books) are usually cutting edge without requiring new discoveries or ideas. Finally, a glance at the jackets of these books reveals reviewers frequently compare apocalyptic fiction and its authors to Clancy and/or Grisham.³⁴

Like science fiction, the techno-thriller is a predominantly male-oriented genre. The adoption of the form by religious writers may be one way of reaching the tepidly religious male audience (like the Promise Keepers effort). But the readership of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is significantly female (at least measured from on-line response and anecdotal evidence). As the maturation of science fiction has meant more women readers, perhaps the use of religious themes with the thriller genre, along with the themes of the Christian romance novel, means a larger percentage of women readers than with the 1980s version of the techno-thriller form.

³⁴ For example, inside the cover of *The Illuminati*, another of Larry Burkett’s books is noted to be “filled with the fast-paced action, suspense, and intrigue of a Clancy thriller.”

So, the political or techno-thriller was in theory well suited for premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, and has been the form most frequently chosen for such fiction. How effective, then, has the execution of this fusion been?

III. EXAMPLES OF THE GENRE.

A. Limitations of Premillennialist Fiction.

First, the bad news: premillennialist fiction is (to put it kindly) not very well written. Reviews outside the faith range from “competent by stodgily written” for the *Left Behind* series³⁵ to “having the prose style of a Hallmark Cards copywriter” for Pat Robertson’s *The End of the Age*.³⁶ Some of this is the fault of the authors, and some is due to the limitations of the form. For example, although the variations in plot have been significant from the viewpoint of biblical scholars, the variations from an entertainment standpoint have been minimal. Originality risks too much deviation from the premillennialist script, from the purpose of arguing for apocalypse and from the conventions of the political or techno-thriller. As the premillennialist script gets more specific as events approach the end, plots often start off from a wider variation, then narrow to inseparability. Still, one could expect more creative writers to write works that would be more distinguishable from each other.

³⁵ Winter, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, 9.

³⁶ Christopher Buckley, *Apocalypse Soon*, review of *The End of the Age*, by Pat Robertson, in *The New York Times Book Review*, Feb. 11, 1996: 8, as quoted in Justin Watson, *How Pat Finally Gets Even: Apocalyptic Asteroids and American Politics In Pat Robertson’s The End of the Age*, *Journal of Millennial Studies*, Winter 2000 (www.mille.org).

Effective polemic is often not good art. Because of its continued specific rhetorical purpose, premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is often fairly didactic and undercharacterized stuff. Rooster books can degenerate into long scriptural expositions among characters we never get to know or care about. Characters with a biblical origin such as the Antichrist are often left deliberately thin. For example, the Antichrist in the *Left Behind* books is repugnantly evil, but we never learn much of his internal life or background prior to the book's events. One of the authors has explained that as the Bible doesn't give too many details, and that for a biblical character he is disinclined to go much beyond the Bible.³⁷ This does not excuse the continual parade of stock characters (for instance, intrepid journalists, cocky soldiers and strong but lonely women) that reappear in these books, with names that sometimes echo each other.³⁸

Nonetheless, despite its lack of variation, there has been some idiosyncratic developments in premillennialist apocalyptic fiction as the examination of specific works below will show. Furthermore, some of the common features across works effectively illustrate the underlying ideological thrust of apocalyptic fiction, and are therefore worth examining. After briefly introducing each of the works, I will analyze their details and themes by topic.

B. *Thief in the Night* Films

³⁷ Jenkins, on-line conference.

³⁸ For example, in *The Illuminati*, the wise evangelical pastor is John Elder, while Pat Robertson's wise evangelical pastor is John Edwards, who is also known as Pastor Jack, echoing the Pastor Jack Mitchell of Zinn's *The Unveiling*.

The *Thief in the Night* series of films (*A Thief in the Night*, *A Distant Thunder*, *Image of the Beast* and *Prodigal Planet*)³⁹ were perhaps the first significant fictional works to track the modern premillennialist script, and certainly among the most influential.⁴⁰ Indeed, the early date of the first one (1973), appears to belie my contention that the move to apocalyptic fiction is 1990s phenomenon. But there are some important features which distinguish these films from the mass marketed for entertainment works of fiction of the 1990s. Foremost, these films were exclusively disseminated among believers in explicitly proselytizing contexts (there was not, at least at first, a home video market for such films) where the interpretation of the fictional message would be in a controlled environment. As visual media, such films, along with comic book representations of prophecy, were regarded more as instructional aids than as entertainment in themselves. Specifically, the *Thief in the Night* films were designed to help scare the audience into the “altar call.”⁴¹ They are typically not mentioned in guides to video movies which contain far more obscure works.⁴² Although their relatively high production values gave them a distinct entertainment component, the films are perhaps better viewed as preparing today’s audience for entertaining apocalyptic fiction rather than as constituting such entertainment themselves.

³⁹ These films were all directed by Don Thompson and released by Mark IV Pictures.

⁴⁰ *A Thief in the Night* may have been seen by as many as one hundred million people in the United States, though because it was shown exclusively in churches and evangelical gatherings this number is difficult to verify. The film had made \$4.2 million in revenues as of 1984. Randall Balmer, “Apocalypticism in America: The Argot of Premillennialism in Popular Culture,” *Prospects* 13:417, 426 and 428; Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 62.

⁴¹ Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 62.

⁴² See, e.g., Mick Martin and Marsha Porter, *Video Movie Guide 1993* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

C. Best Sellers.

1. *The Illuminati*

As noted above, Larry Burkett's *The Illuminati* (over 250,000 sold, went to mass market paperback in 1996) was one of the first of the current wave of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, with a publication date of 1991. This prototype has one interesting point besides the explicit reference in its title to Illuminati conspiracy theory. It describes a failed apocalypse which is foiled by human efforts. As such it is not really within the premillennial script, representing more of a trial run. Indeed, the book ominously intones at its end that Satan would try again (with implied success) in 50 years.⁴³ Thus, perhaps because of some uncertainty in the appropriateness of fiction to describe the true biblical apocalypse, *The Illuminati* takes full advantage of the rhetorical possibility in fiction that nonfictional interpretation has trouble utilizing: the real, unavoidable apocalypse is coming soon, but the avoidable evil is here now to be fought and beaten by true believers. As preacher protagonist John Elder states at the end,

We weren't the generation to see the ascension of the Antichrist.
But one day he will ascend, and that generation will not escape the
persecution. Perhaps God in his infinite wisdom has given us a second
chance. Let us pray that we will not waste it.⁴⁴

The head of the Illuminati and would be herald of the Antichrist is Amir Hussein, a half-Jewish, half-Iraqi arms dealer.⁴⁵ His allies in the United States include the "National Civil Liberties Union,"⁴⁶ a clear swipe at the ACLU, and even a traitor

⁴³ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 373.

⁴⁴ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 373.

⁴⁵ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 85.

⁴⁶ See Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 144.

within the evangelical church.⁴⁷ He is brought down by John Elder, a computer whiz named Jeff, a media tycoon named Galt (who bears some resemblance to an older Ted Turner) and, oddly enough, the Mossad. They manage to publicize the truth about the Illuminati and Hussein. Jeff and Galt both start as unbelievers but convert.

2. The *Millennium* trilogy.

Another set of steady sellers are the *Millennium* trilogy by Paul Meier.⁴⁸ The first volume, *The Third Millennium*, is relatively early in the wave. The trilogy is relatively unique in that it devotes a whole volume to the struggle at the end of the millennial kingdom, a period of time for which there is very little detail in the premillennialist script. Unfortunately, the end of the millennial kingdom reads much the same as its beginning in the previous volume. The old veterans of the previous fight go up against evil that still comes from the same “others” as 1000 years before: Islam, Hinduism, etc.

The trilogy’s sequence is odd in another respect – the last volume basically recapitulates the first, but with more detailed discussion of “spiritual warfare.” Besides responding to popular interest in this topic, this recapitulation may have been an attempt to in effect reissue the first volume as a new book to take advantage of apocalyptic fiction’s current popularity.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 88.

⁴⁸ Paul Meier, *The Third Millennium* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993); Paul Meier and Robert L. Wise, *The Fourth Millennium* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996); Paul Meier and Robert L. Wise, *Beyond the Millennium* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

⁴⁹ The authors may have also been tapping into the known popularity of the spiritual warfare genre, noted above.

The main protagonists are a Jewish family, the Feinbergs, their two children, Ruth and Ben, and their respective love interests, a Chinese-American named Cindy and the alienated son of a preacher named Jimmy. They are all converted to Christianity after the Rapture, and become heroes in the Tribulation struggle. The archangel Michael and an angelic protégé, along with assorted demons, are characters in the third volume.

3. The *Left Behind* series.

By far the most popular of the premillennialist fictional works on the market today are the *Left Behind* books by LaHaye and Jenkins.⁵⁰ As of September 1999, the first six books in the series (eight are currently available) had sold more than 8 million copies.⁵¹ At least four more volumes in the series are expected, and a movie is scheduled for release February 2, 2001.

There are several likely reasons for the relative success of the *Left Behind* books: with a 1995 start, they were relatively early in the wave of premillennialist fiction, that have relatively detailed characterization and integrate characters' lives with biblical prophecy fairly well. Their serialization has produced something akin to a soap opera, an "apocalypse opera" may be a good name for it. The division of labor between the nonfictional bible scholar and a fiction writer who actually has experience telling a story (and who does the actual writing) may be helpful. The emphasis on character and romance and fantasy elements makes the works seem less didactic.⁵² This still does not

⁵⁰ See the bibliography for the complete list.

⁵¹ Winter, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, 9.

⁵² Serialized and character driven works also seem to do better in the anti-apocalyptic fictional forms to be discussed in Part Two.

raise the form to great literature by any means; critics are still generally disapproving.⁵³
But it does help explain their relative popularity.

Jenkins own view is instructive: “I applaud every effort to spread the gospel. I don’t know what has set ours apart, but people tell us they have fallen in love with the characters and care about what happens to them.”⁵⁴ The authors are careful to only explore the interior lives of the longer surviving characters; other characters might as well be extras in a science fiction series for the length of their life spans.

The main protagonist is airline captain Rayford Steele, who with his daughter Chloe has been left behind in the Rapture by his wife and son. They are joined by reporter Buck Williams and a left behind assistant pastor, Bruce, in forming the Tribulation Force, a group dedicated to opposing the Antichrist and attempting to survive until the Second Coming. Bruce doesn’t survive very long, and Tsion Ben-Judah, a recently converted Jewish scholar, replaces him as the group’s spiritual mentor. Rayford feels responsible for the spiritual fate of his former flight attendant and near mistress, Hattie, who becomes the temporary consort of the Antichrist. The Tribulation Force is later joined by an African-American physician, Floyd Charles, but he also does not survive until the most recent volume. Other converts have joined just under the wire of the mark of the Beast being imposed.

The time is assiduously never specified, other than (given the descriptions of available technology) implicitly being soon. The books move like variations on the pursuit nightmare – the characters always seem to be fleeing from one place to another, or

⁵³ See Winter, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, 9.

⁵⁴ Jenkins, on-line conference.

looking for one of their team. Such scenes are interspersed with preaching or biblical commentary on events and punctuated with the biblical judgments.

Of the apocalyptic fiction reviewed here, the *Left Behind* series has a relatively light touch on ideology. The politics even now and then strikes a subversive note: for example, an Antichrist who's more concerned with infrastructure than human lives appears to be a metaphor for global investment capitalism. But the underlying conservative message is still clear enough, as described in detail below.⁵⁵

4. Pat Robertson's *The End of the Age*.

Pat Robertson's *The End of the Age* (which briefly passed Michael Crichton on the NY Times bestseller list⁵⁶) is a bizarre wish fulfillment of a frustrated politician.⁵⁷ Robertson indulges in describing suicide and drunken incompetence in the oval office, accusing the Washington Post of extortion and tormenting Congress with demons. *The End of the Age* reflects Robertson's return to standard pessimism/fatalism of *The Late Great Planet Earth* from an almost post-millennialist rhetoric during his political campaign.⁵⁸

In contrast to most other works, the United States is seen as the center of the action, not Israel. The United States is the central kingdom of the Antichrist. The

⁵⁵ The authors have also created a parallel series of books for children, in which proselytizing and entertainment are perhaps more tightly bound. See the bibliography for the complete listing. For example, their Tribulation oppressive high school is an obvious extension of a normal public school in its restrictions on religious practice. The children's books have become a guilty pleasure for parents waiting for the next entries in the adult series. See Jenkins, on-line conference.

⁵⁶ Information from Amazon.com.

⁵⁷ For a detailed study of how *The End of the Age* reflects Pat Robertson's post-presidential campaign agenda and views, see Watson, How Pat Finally Gets Even.

military showdown between good and evil is in the western United States instead of Israel, as if Robertson were validating the Mormon conception of the United States (and in particular the western United States) as the new Zion. The book also contains numerous factual errors and oddities: for example, influenza as a “bacterial” epidemic, a misunderstanding of WWII history and hedging on the responsibility of Aum Shinrikyo for the gas attack in the Tokyo subways.

Robertson limits salvation explicitly to fundamentalists, but the book is relatively thin on biblical details generally, and shows a relative ease and non-literality with the details it uses. For instance, there is not a literal army of 200 million horsemen, as Robertson seems to understand that it’s logistically impossible. And the two witnesses are nowhere to be seen (unless they are very obscurely represented in the book).

Finally, the Rapture does not precede the Tribulation; rather, there is only a post-Tribulation transport to the new Jerusalem. This means that Robertson may have an apocalyptic conflict in which his true Christians are still present and fighting, instead of watching from afar, which comports well with the political activism of the author. How the book expresses his ideology is further outlined below.

5. *The Omega Code*

A film released in fall of 1999, *The Omega Code*, grossed \$ 2.4 million its first weekend, despite limited release and a budget of only \$7 million.⁵⁹ The film uses the controversial idea of a “bible code” as developed Michael Drosnin’s book of the same

⁵⁸ See O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 184-189; Watson, *How Pat Finally Gets Even*, 4, n. 18.

⁵⁹ Claudia Puig, *Sleeper ‘Omega’ Cracks Hollywood Code*, *USA Today*, Oct. 19, 1999: D1.

name.⁶⁰ The code is like a computerized acrostic game with scripture. In the film, however, the code is only used lightly as a confirmation of the standard premillennialist line of biblical interpretation.

Casper Van Dien plays a personal motivation trainer who becomes caught up in the world domination schemes of the Antichrist (played by Michael York). The two witnesses become the aggressive composite representation of the good spiritual forces. An unconventional feature of the film is that the Antichrist has what appears to be a mistress both before and after his resurrection. A particularly disturbing image is the explosion of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount.

D. Other Works

1. Lindsey's *Blood Moon*

The success of the *Left Behind* series has inspired many other works. Hal Lindsey's book *Blood Moon* may be the most significant of the other fictional apocalypses if only because of its author's fame in the nonfictional interpretive arena.

Of course, he sticks very closely to his own nonfictional scenario. His approach is to parallel biblical and other religious history events to future events. The relation of historical fiction to history is much like the relationship of apocalyptic fiction to nonfictional interpretive works; the former being more focused on individuals, the later on large scale deterministic forces. In Lindsey's book, historical fiction meets apocalyptic fiction explicitly.

⁶⁰ Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

2. The Rest.

The other works I reviewed for this paper are the *Christ Clone* trilogy,⁶¹ *The End of Days*,⁶² *The Seal of Gaia*,⁶³ *Flee the Darkness*,⁶⁴ *The Fourth Reich*,⁶⁵ *The Unveiling*,⁶⁶ *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*,⁶⁷ *Apocalypse* and *Escape from Armageddon*. My notes on the plots of these works are included in Appendix Two to this paper.

IV. THEMES OF THE GENRE

Like *Titanic*, we know how each of these stories must end. And, given that the time of the end is always very soon, we know that the stories will usually begin in today's world. Since conclusion is very tightly scripted, the differences are usually only in the early plot development of the stories. It is perhaps not surprising then that the same themes appear repeatedly in these works, usually only differing in emphasis.

A. Ideology

Millennial scholar Lee Quinby discusses the apocalyptic ideology of purity, an apocalyptic othering, advocated consciously or unconsciously by

⁶¹ BeauSeigneur, *In His Image*; James BeauSeigneur, *Birth of an Age* (Rockville, MD: SelectiveHouse, 1997); James BeauSeigneur, *Acts of God* (Rockville, MD: SelectiveHouse, 1998).

⁶² David Dolan, *The End of Days* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1995). Not to be confused with the recent film of the same title starring Arnold Schwarzeneger, which decidedly did not follow the premillennialist script.

⁶³ Marlin Maddoux, *Seal of Gaia* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998).

⁶⁴ Grant R. Jeffrey and Angela Hunt, *Flee the Darkness* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998).

⁶⁵ Robert Van Kampen, *The Fourth Reich* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997).

⁶⁶ Jay Zinn, *The Unveiling* (Mukilteo, Washington: WinePress Publishing, 1997).

premillennialist groups.⁶⁸ What is implicit in the nonfictional text often comes more to the fore in fictional works which may more fully express the fantasies of the author.

At the most general level, the reader of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is continually faced with the incongruity of the biblical judgments related to global concerns (environmental, nuclear weapons, asteroids and disease) that might be mitigated by global cooperation, yet global cooperation is in itself one of the major evils. In the view of many evangelical Christians, there cannot be peace until the Second Coming.⁶⁹ Global cooperation means cooperation with multiple forms of “other.” The general ideology of purity and othering is also applied to a spectrum of specific issues throughout premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, as discussed below.

As noted above, the relative success of the “Left Behind” books may in part be due to the fact that they have a lighter touch on contemporary politics, but it shares most of ideological points of the genre.

1. Chastity

Part of the ideology of purity is an ideal of chastity. According to Quinby, chastity is “seen as the prerogative of heterosexual believers because they alone – regardless of racial or ethnic lineage – could celebrate the joy of premarital abstinence and eventually enjoy marital, procreative sexuality.”⁷⁰ The typical device for expressing this ideology is one or more pairs of courting protagonists, often despite age and

⁶⁷ Walter L. Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events* (Nashville: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1993).

⁶⁸ See Lee Quinby, *Millennial Seduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁶⁹ Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 41.

⁷⁰ Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 60.

upbringing impossibly virgin, who amidst the gathering clouds of apocalyptic judgments engage in a standard Harlequin-style romance with perhaps elements of a comedy of manners that you would find in a Jane Austen courtship. This comic rhetoric sometimes contrasts sharply with the tragic overall tone, reflecting its different origin in the Christian romance novel. Where there is a pair of couples, the story may present a juxtaposition of God approved consummation and God mandated separation, and even alternate these roles. The virginity of the protagonists is thus a sign of God's grace and destiny for them, and God continues to mandate control of sexuality even in the love between two of the elect.

.In the *Millennium* trilogy, both of the children of the Feinbergs undergo imposed chastity in their relationships at alternate times in the series, with an ultimate union in chaste love for all at the end. In Zinn's *The Unveiling*, there is also a dual Harlequin romance, one consummated, the other separated and creating tension. In the *Left Behind* books, Chloe remains virginal even at Stanford because her mother's expectations kept her "from doing something really stupid."⁷¹ Her partner in chaste courtship is the internationally renown reporter Buck, whose lifestyle and greater age make his chastity all the more difficult to believe. In contrast, the promiscuous character of Hattie is particularly vulnerable to the Antichrist through her sensuality. In *The Illuminati*, there is a virginal romance between computer whiz and his co-worker.⁷² In Lindsey's *Blood Moon*, the soldier Jeremy is kept chastely apart in Israel from his beloved Erin in the United States by the course of apocalyptic events. The Lalondes, in

⁷¹ LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 236.

⁷² See Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 237.

Apocalypse, contrast the virginity of their soon to be converted protagonist with the unchaste women who “drank too much, said yes to things where no would have been the better answer.”⁷³

The Bible uses the metaphor of lovers or bride and bridegroom for the relation of God and his believers,⁷⁴ and this metaphor is not far from the mind of these authors in their portrayal of chaste romance. For example, in *Flee the Darkness*, Daniel the computer whiz and Lauren the presidential aide have a Harlequin-style romance, both between their practically virginal selves and between themselves and God. The uncertainties in their interpersonal and interdeity negotiations take as much priority as the fate of the world. The conversion experience, further discussed below, is like a form of chaste courtship.

2. Anti-feminism/misogyny

In apocalyptic accounts, as Quinby notes, “purity is depicted as necessary to preserve the two God-ordained hierarchies which, one, privilege men over women and two, elevate all true followers over unbelievers.”⁷⁵ It follows that many apocalyptic accounts will scapegoat feminists.⁷⁶ Feminism is condemned not just as a movement, but through the example of particular individuals. Women may be strong characters, but purity is a priority and they must act within their appropriate sphere.

⁷³ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 139.

⁷⁴ For example, this is the standard if somewhat implausible interpretation of the Song of Songs.

⁷⁵ Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 108.

⁷⁶ See discussion Quinby’s discussion of the Promise Keepers and “how their principal concept of purity depends on scapegoating feminists and homosexuals.” Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 12.

As usual, the *Left Behind* series is slightly more complex in characterization than its fellow genre members, and perhaps more effectively embodies the modern ambiguities of the biblical ideal of women's submission. Chloe, the smart but young daughter of the main protagonist Rayford, has a firm handshake⁷⁷ and engages in a strange dynamic in which she must constantly assert her place on the Tribulation Force team, and yet once asserted her place is always respected by the males. But even in the exceptional times of the Tribulation, she is not exempted from traditional wifely desires and duties: becoming pregnant and being a mother. Marriage, for a woman in the *Left Behind* world, is agreeing to "being yours."

For Robertson in his *The End of the Age*, a militant black feminist attorney general is the embodiment of legal evil (admittedly tongue in cheek). The evil Valery Rust, wife of the soon to be assassinated President, looks forward to the rise of the Antichrist so she may "install her radical sisters in key government posts."⁷⁸ And we are reminded that Adam listening to Eve, his wife, is the first sin. More sinister is *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, which indulges in a perverse condemnation of a series of Jezebels. We are treated to a twisted description of child seducing her uncle, and a repeating theme of teenage girls hitting on older men. The author also appears to be obsessed with rape.⁷⁹ For Lalonde in *Apocalypse*, a women's peace group becomes the pawn of Antichrist, implicitly because their specifically feminine concerns make them more easily duped. In *The Illuminati*, women in authority (a U.S. president and a judge)

⁷⁷ LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 364

⁷⁸ Robertson, *The End of the Age*, 256.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 434.

are pawns of evil,⁸⁰ while a woman on the side of good must defer to the priority of her spouse's escape.⁸¹ The condemnation of abortion and the pro-choice position is of course universal in these works.⁸²

3. Homophobia

"Apocalypse" for Quinby "is a regime of truth that over many centuries has been especially oppressive towards women and racial and sexual minorities"⁸³ and therefore homosexuals are also the scapegoats in many apocalyptic accounts. Examples of the anti-gay bias of the premillennialist fiction writers manifesting itself in characterizations and plot abound. Oddly, a common assumption is that the homosexual character is mostly vulnerable because of his or her fear of being discovered, a fear that is plausible in part because of the efforts of people like these authors.

In the *Left Behind* series, the character of Verna, "a young woman in sensible shoes,"⁸⁴ is a shrewish lesbian, and she is so insecure about it that she allows her background to be used to keep her quiet. Later, Buck of the Tribulation Force observes homosexual couples in an Israeli club and thinks that this "was not the Israel he remembered."⁸⁵ In Pat Robertson's *The End of the Age*, the gay lifestyle of Percy DuVal, the White House personnel officer, subjects the character to blackmail.⁸⁶ In *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, the gay lifestyle again subjects a character to blackmail.

⁸⁰ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 89.

⁸¹ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 287-88.

⁸² E.g., LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 266-68.

⁸³ Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 10.

⁸⁴ LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 411.

⁸⁵ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Apollyon* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 125.

Both *The Illuminati* and *The End of Days* engage in gay bashing. *The Illuminati* is as usual particularly egregious: a gay California governor's election is a harbinger of doom, gangs of youthful minions of evil carry "Gay Power" signs⁸⁷ and one of the minions of the Illuminati is an implied lesbian.⁸⁸ In *The Omega Code*, the Antichrist makes an implicitly tolerant reference to the homosexuality, and that reference may refer to the sexuality of his False Prophet.

4. Racism/Cultural Insensitivity

Premillennialist apocalyptic fiction manifests how, in Quinby's view, "Christian fundamentalism divides the redeemed from the unredeemed along religious, sexual and ethnic lines."⁸⁹ The *Left Behind* series is once again slightly more complex and relatively benign than other representatives of the genre. The globe hopping nature of the work lends itself to the introduction of multi-ethnic characters, but the series still falls prey to a clichéd, almost Vaudeville style representation of other races and creeds. For example, a Middle Eastern character is a sharp trader of illegal goods. One African-American doctor is a core member of the team for a while, yet when another African-American character is told to expect him, he is told that the doctor "looks a lot like you."⁹⁰ Similarly, in the *Millennium* trilogy, a Chinese-American family is, due to their proverbial industriousness, at first more interested in the Bible as a means of financial and social advancement.

⁸⁶ Robertson, *The End of the Age*, 164. Also, Valery Rust, the President's wife who assists the rise of the Antichrist, is bisexual. Robertson, *The End of the Age*, 59.

⁸⁷ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 182.

⁸⁸ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 330.

⁸⁹ Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 37.

⁹⁰ LaHaye, *Apollyon*, 371

Sometimes the racist assumptions are less ambiguous. In *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, “We Shall Overcome” is sung by the minions of evil.⁹¹ A U.S. vice president who is a patsy of evil is African-American, and the armies of Asia are repeatedly referred to as a “yellow horde.” In the Lalondes’ *Apocalypse*, there is implicit disapproval of miscegenation.⁹² In *The Illuminati*, Asians are “inscrutable”⁹³ and the economic threat of Japan is used as leverage by the forces of evil.⁹⁴ Minorities in the United States are associated with drug pushers, criminals and anarchists.⁹⁵

Although completely consistent with their theology, it is still surprising the extent to which some of the genre’s authors literally demonize other major religions. In Pat Robertson’s *The End of the Age*, the antagonists emerge from Hinduism, with the third eye as a symbol of evil and the god Shiva as Satan.⁹⁶ In *Blood Moon*, Hal Lindsey represents the foundation of Islam as a Satanic event, and Mohammed as possessed by the devil. Furthermore, the Antichrist was raised a “devout Catholic”⁹⁷ and the Pope is his False Prophet.⁹⁸ In the *Millennium* trilogy, one thousand years of Messianic rule is not enough to change the ways of Hindus and Muslims, who once again attempt to attack Israel. The *Left Behind* series makes Peter Mathews, the formerly Catholic cardinal who becomes head of the Babylon church, a relatively clownish figure.

5. Anti-Semitism and Ambivalence

⁹¹ Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 222

⁹² Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 66.

⁹³ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 309.

⁹⁴ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 62-64.

⁹⁵ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 80.

⁹⁶ Robertson, *The End of the Age*, 170.

⁹⁷ Lindsey, *Blood Moon*, 31.

⁹⁸ Lindsey, *Blood Moon*, 93.

Premillennialist apocalyptic fiction aptly reflects the profound ambivalence of evangelical Christians such as Lindsey towards the Jews and Israel. The continued existence of the Jews and the ultimate triumph of Israel are essential to apocalyptic prophecy, but the conversion of large numbers of the Jews and their persecution by the Antichrist are also regarded as essential.⁹⁹ Charles Strozier concludes that “Generally then, fundamentalism is theologically pro-Jewish and at the same time anti-Semitic.”¹⁰⁰ In fiction in particular, where individual character is essential, it is important to understand that fundamentalists “in the end, have little empathy for the Jews” and that as a consequence, “Jews tend to be either idealized or debased but seldom perceived as a people.”¹⁰¹ The central protagonists of the genre are therefore often Jewish, and their conversion or failure to convert is often the central drama. The facility of their conversion in these novels speaks to the lack empathy of the authors for Jewish convictions. On the other hand, the central antagonists, such as the Antichrist and the False Prophet, are also often at least partly of Jewish origin.¹⁰²

In the *Left Behind* series, the first people destroyed by Eli and Moshe are Orthodox Jews¹⁰³ – it seems a Jewish person is better off at least initially in that world if they are secularized or scholarly. Tsion Ben-Judah is elevated spiritually, but viewed somewhat comically in terms of personal character traits, much like the Vaudeville characterizations of other ethnic groups noted above. Robertson’s position in his fiction

⁹⁹ See Wojcik, *The End of the World as We Know It*, 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 206.

¹⁰¹ Strozier, *Apocalypse*, 206-7.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*.

¹⁰³ LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 325-26.

is ambiguous: Orthodox Jews are portrayed positively, but he is otherwise atypically silent on the Jews and their apocalyptic fate.¹⁰⁴ In the first volume of the *Millennium* trilogy, the Feinbergs are not particularly religious Jews, and there is a strong implication that if they had been “better” Jews, they would have converted to Christianity prior to the Rapture instead of after it.

Perhaps the most outrageously anti-Semitic of the works reviewed is *The Illuminati*, which co-opts the rhetoric of the Holocaust (to which it never refers by name) for Christians. Up until their betrayal by the forces of evil, the Jews serve the putative Antichrist in oppressing Christianity, and are explicitly compared to the Nazis for doing so. An example of the numerous offensive statements in this book is found in the words ascribed to a future Israeli leader, “Perhaps it is time we admitted that it is we who are attempting to become the master race today.”¹⁰⁵

6. Hybridization

Premillennialist apocalyptic fiction’s insistence on purity and rejection of the other is manifested through a rejection of any direct merger between the angelic, demonic, and human participants in the conflict.¹⁰⁶ Such hybridization is itself an abomination. In nearly all these works, the Antichrist is, or will become, a human/demon hybrid. In Lindsey’s *Blood Moon*, he spends two pages discussing angelic/human hybrids, Nephilim, as a previous example of how Satan attempted to merge fallen angels and

¹⁰⁴ See Robertson, *The End of the Age*, and Watson, *How Pat Finally Gets Even*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ In contrast, the anti-apocalyptic works embrace the other through approval of hybridization across the various divides. This will be discussed further in Part Two.

humans to subvert God's plan.¹⁰⁷ It seems odd to be focused on this past history in what is otherwise a discussion of future events, except if the apocalyptic theme of purity is understood to be the common thread. The *Christ Clone* trilogy and *The Fourth Reich* combine their opposition to such hybridization with a fear of the implications of new biological technologies – whether Hitler or Christ is cloned, the results are the same in the end. Only one human/supernatural hybrid, Jesus, is pure, but his purity is a unique mystery.

7. Anti-environmentalism.

Nature finds itself as an “other” in most of the fictional apocalyptic scenarios. It is stunning the extent to which some of these works condemn environmentalists as exaggerating the world's ecological difficulties, often as a precursor to or support of the Antichrist's new world order agenda. In *Seal of Gaia*, environmentalism becomes one of the justifications for terminating children up to three years of age and the collapse of the ecosystem is a charade. In *Eclipse of the Sun*, environmentalism again supports the coming darkness, and (this being a Canadian author)

¹⁰⁷ Lindsey, *Blood Moon*, 154-156. *The Nightmare of the Apocalypse*, a nonfictional work by a researcher for Hal Lindsey, further describes how the Nephilim were a satanic plot to contaminate the messianic lineage.

This work deals with Satan's attempt to kill Jesus even before He was born. One of these attempts involved *Nephilim* (fallen ones/demonic creatures), who, through inbreeding with ancient humanity, nearly destroyed mankind's existence. This in turn would have eliminated a *human* Messiah from David's line as a possibility, thus negating God's divine plan of redemption.

Philip N. Moore, *Nightmare of the Apocalypse: The Rabbi Conspiracy* (Atlanta: The Conspiracy, Incorporated, 1997), xi (emphasis in the original).

a form of global warming becomes a blessing.¹⁰⁸ *The Unveiling of End-Time Events* is anti-environmentalist,¹⁰⁹ but later makes a point about the consequences of air pollution!

Nature then becomes God's instrument to chastise humankind through the judgments, which often take the form of ecological disasters, asteroid strikes and new diseases. Only after the Second Coming is nature reduced to an idyllic passivity. The natural other is tamed, not accepted or understood.

B. Relation to Survivalism

There is a consistent tension between survivalism and the survival strategies of the Christian protagonists in premillennialist fiction. The Christian protagonists have to take precautions and have fall back safe positions, basically survival enclaves, from which they can resist the Antichrist. However, the protagonists must stay engaged with evil. This typically does not mean an aggressive militia style tactics, because once the Antichrist is on the scene, there is a fatalistic acceptance of events running their course in accordance with prophecy. Survivalism in general and the militia movement in particular with their aggressive tactics are therefore philosophically at odds with pre-tribulationism – they are more “post-tribulationist.”¹¹⁰

The *Left Behind* series and *The Illuminati* seem to endorse survivalist tactics, but not to the point of violence. Rayford, the main protagonist of the *Left Behind* series, is sympathetic to the militias when their struggle turns exclusively against Antichrist, but the militias ultimately appear to be patsies allowing the Antichrist to exert

¹⁰⁸ Michael D. O'Brien, *Eclipse of the Sun* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press) 1998. This odd book from a series by a nominally Catholic author is not strictly on the premillennialist script, and therefore not summarized in Appendix Two.

¹⁰⁹ See Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 90-91.

force against them, so they are inferior to fatalistic Christians. The Tribulation Force prepares a fully equipped underground shelter in which to go into hiding. *Apocalypse* similarly dissociates from survivalists,¹¹¹ and Zinn's *The Unveiling* expresses ambivalence regarding militia: they are fighting the right cause, but often lack the right faith. On the other hand, as Robertson has a post-tribulationist view, it is not surprising (but politically meaningful) that he advocates enclave survivalism as the ultimate recourse during the Tribulation.

The Jordanian city of Petra frequently serves as a survivalist camp model in the same manner as Jerusalem is model city. A frequent theme in biblical prophecy interpretation and these fictional works is that a faithful remnant of Jews will take shelter from the Tribulation at Petra, where God will protect them.¹¹²

The potential danger in some of the tactics described in these fictions is that they might be applied in real world responses to an imagined oppression in an imagined end time scenario. For example, in *The Fourth Reich*, in order to preserve the secrecy of their locations, no one gets to leave the survival camps or they will be shot.

C. Conversion

Despite the new emphasis on entertainment value, plot and characterization, premillennial apocalyptic fiction never forgets its role as an instrument for proselytization. The rhetorical center of its argument appears to be the frequent repetition of descriptions of the conversion experience. Conversion is the only way to

¹¹⁰ Lamy, *Millennium Rage*, 89.

¹¹¹ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 160-161

¹¹² Examples include the *Millennium* and *Christ Clone* trilogies, and the *Left Behind* series is moving in that direction.

avoid the more horrible of the coming judgments, though nothing will necessarily save the physical lives of those “left behind.” Conversion before the Rapture is of course the most desirable course.

Despite the numerous fantastic elements in the genre, the frequency and ease of the conversions of unbelievers and Jews is perhaps the most implausible aspect of the premillennial fictional plots. In the *Millennium* trilogy, the Jewish Feinberg family and the prodigal son of an evangelical minister are readily converted with very little argument. In *The Illuminati*, the cynical media tycoon Galt is persuaded to convert and save the good guys at the end. In Robertson’s *The End of the Age*, escapees from the destruction of the West Coast are converted after some fairly simple discussions. In *The Fourth Reich*, non-religious Russian Jews are converted with enviable ease.

Plausibility is not so much an issue in the *Left Behind* books, as conversion seems pretty rational in their version of the post-Rapture world. Yet, no other work is perhaps so tediously repetitious of the conversion formula. Given the popularity of the *Left Behind* series, this device must have some appeal to readers. Perhaps believing readers enjoy the reiteration of being right that viewing the fictional conversion experience provides. Perhaps they also unconsciously view conversion as in some sense the true romance of these stories.

It is usually unbelievers with some tie to the Christian or Jewish traditions, and not New Agers or those of Islamic or eastern traditions, for whom the novels depict the conversion. New Agers are the near universal enemy in this genre, and only rarely do these dupes of Satan see the error of their ways. The litany of enemies in the *Christ Clone* trilogy reads like a New Age bibliography: Jung, Maslow, Rogers, Richard Bach,

George Lucas, Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahai and Mary Baker Eddy.¹¹³ This framework finesses and subverts the true central conflict of modern Western civilization, the conflict between science or skepticism and religion, by substituting the straw man of the New Age as the bad guy, and making the conversion of unbelievers appear relatively easy.

The converted unbeliever often has a believing, usually older, family member who has been attempting to bring the skeptic into the faith, such as the computer whiz Daniel's saintly mother *Flee the Darkness*, or Chloe's raptured mother in the *Left Behind* series. This conversion fantasy may have particular appeal to such believing readers who face skepticism in their own families, giving the believer confidence that, contrary to recent history, time is on his or her side.

D. The Importance of Biblical Scholarship

A consistent element in Protestant control of biblical interpretation has been that such interpretation is complex "scholarship" requiring extensive training.¹¹⁴ The rather obvious prophetic scenarios repeated *ad nauseum* since *The Late Great Planet Earth* thus become esoterica requiring the explanations of trained biblical scholars throughout the course of the premillennialist fictions. Particularly, the *Left Behind* books have at their center the characters of Pastor Bruce and then Tsion Ben-Judah, upon whom the Tribulation Force and then the rest of the world wait with great expectancy for the latest utterance on what is in fact a widely known scenario. In Zinn's *The Unveiling*, the characters continually marvel at the new insights into scripture that are revealed to

¹¹³ BeauSeigneur, *Birth of an Age*, 203.

¹¹⁴ The scholarly orthodoxy of premillennialism has its center at the Dallas Theological Seminary. See Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 31-47.

them.¹¹⁵ The authors seem to have underestimated the influence of the premillennialist view: if the Rapture did occur tomorrow, a majority of the population left behind in this country would almost certainly be aware of the premillennialist theory as to what had occurred, and what they could expect to happen next, without further scholarly interpretation. As the *Left Behind* books themselves note, the Rapture would be the ultimate told you so and refutation of “academic pretense.”¹¹⁶ But it does not comport with the premillennialist view that people are in fact aware of their beliefs and yet do not accept them.

E. Scientific and technological props.

Like the political thriller genre, premillennialist apocalyptic fiction has borrowed some of the devices of science fiction (even as science fiction has borrowed religious imagery as discussed in Part Two) – cloning, computers, asteroids and other astronomical props, biological weapons, other advanced weaponry etc. – in telling a story that otherwise requires little in the way of new ideas. When they appear, these technological innovations or cosmic phenomena may be instrumental in the apocalyptic destruction of most of humankind through the biblical judgments. If they are key elements in the particular apocalyptic scenario, these technological innovations act as an implicit explanation of why prophecy is to be fulfilled now and not before and give voice to audience concerns about such innovations and related societal changes. They also broaden the potential audience and appeal of works which otherwise do not have much room for plot innovation.

¹¹⁵ See, e.g., Zinn, *The Unveiling*, 387-88.

¹¹⁶ LaHaye, *Left Behind*, 237.

Examples of science fiction props abound. The *Christ Clone* trilogy hypothesizes a clone of Christ created from dermal cells from the shroud of Turin who turns out to be the Antichrist. In *The Fourth Reich*, a clone of Hitler is the Antichrist. The *Millennium* books adopt the “Bible Code” computer driven interpretation of some prophetic events. Perhaps the most science fiction like work of the genre is *Seal of Gaia*, which is explicitly set a whole generation in the future, and features a supercomputer that becomes the incarnation of evil while new diseases are created for the destruction of whole populations. Several of the books speculate that at least one of the biblical judgments may come in the form of an asteroid strike (though they do not acknowledge the irony that the general public’s present concern with such strikes is in part due to the theory that such an event triggered the extinction of the dinosaurs). A favorite chestnut is designing the mark of the Beast as a sub-cutaneous computer chip.

On the other hand, the *Left Behind* series, while postulating that both good and evil are fully wired and wireless, does not rely much on scientific props. The one notable exception (besides the perennial computer chip “mark”) is that the Israel of the near future comes to possess a formula which allows deserts to bloom, and this formula is a linchpin in the Antichrist’s rise to global domination.

The use of these “scientific” elements, no matter how fantastic, gives these works another aspect of factual authority and contemporary relevance. Science has historically been far more detrimental to Christian religious faith than New Age ideas and, despite some current skepticism regarding the value of technological progress, still possesses a preeminent authority in today’s world. By using such scientific props, the premillennialist apocalyptic fiction genre co-opts instead of confronts science.

However, the science in such works is generally not very sharp or, as a good science fiction writer would call it, “hard.” There is a frequent near conflation of technology and magic, as when in *Seal of Gaia* the power of a computer is just a cover for demonic powered action. A completely scientific mindset is inimical to the enterprise of the premillennialist authors, so these science fiction props remain just incongruous isolated elements, standing out strangely amidst supernatural elements. These works never really cross the line into the realm of true science fiction. Indeed, science fiction is often thought to be part of the apocalyptic other. For example, a frequent plot device is having the general public believe that the Rapture was caused by UFO’s, reflecting the contemporary obsession with the fringe world between reality and science fiction

As noted above, appropriate technology is an important element of date setting. New technologies that are instrumental in the apocalypse help explain why the end hasn’t come until now, yet the technologies must be in practical form soon enough to keep the work set in the immediate future.¹¹⁷

F. Relation of Humankind to Heaven and Hell.

The apocalyptic conflict may be viewed as a conflict among three spheres, Heaven, Hell and humankind/earth. Within premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, humankind/earth often seems to be merely the scene of the fight, and not in itself an active principle. Despite some abstract doctrinal protests to the contrary, a clear hierarchy emerges, in which angels and other heavenly powers are superior to demons and humans,

¹¹⁷ Furthermore, as implied by God’s launching a piece of lava to destroy the space shuttle in *The Fourth Reich* (summarized in Appendix Two), humankind cannot have moved so far from earth that the end of this world ceases to mean the end of humanity.

and demons are superior to unsaved humans. The only real power that humans have is the choice of faith.

An example of this hierarchy and human passivity is the *Millennium* trilogy, which acknowledges a *de jure* superiority of humans, but has angels completely running the show, and angelic interference driving the plot. In Zinn's *The Unveiling*, angels are explicitly superior.¹¹⁸ In the *Left Behind* series, the two witnesses Eli and Moshe are no longer human, they are supernatural beings, and their superiority in power and holiness is acknowledged with great fear by the faithful. Generally in this genre, demons consistently have their way with the unfaithful through possession and various unpleasant torments.

G. The Rapture Problem.

A significant tension in the moral consistency of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is the problem of the Rapture and those “left behind.” Nonfictional prophetic interpretations could be unambiguous in warning that the Tribulation would be undesirable to experience, and thereby maintain their argumentative focus on accepting the born again faith now. But in the search for dramatic narrative conflict, many representatives of the fictional genre have turned at least part of their focus to the post-Rapture days. *Left Behind* co-author Jenkins asserts that no one should want, even in the least, from reading his works to be “left behind.”¹¹⁹ But both his artistic and commercial success undermine his contention. Not all those readers are fantasizing about watching events from heaven and saying “I told you so.” Rather, it seems probable within such a

¹¹⁸ Zinn, *The Unveiling*, 164.

¹¹⁹ Jenkins, on-line conference.

large group who enjoy reading about characters in the Tribulation there must be a substantial number who fantasize about being in the Tribulation too, enduring the hardships and fighting unambiguous evil. Indeed, the appeal to this particular fantasy may in part explain the current popularity of the fictional argument measured against the fatalistic nonfictional argument. It is somewhat disingenuous and rhetorically inconsistent for the authors of such fictional works not to acknowledge their probable effect.

V. DENOUEMENT?

The surge of premillennial fictional efforts in the late 1990s in part anticipated the years 2000-2001. Therefore, the close relationship of the forms of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction and the techno-thriller raises a question: Will the passing of 2000-2001 deflate the apocalyptic fiction genre as the aftermath of 1989 deflated the techno-thriller? As a speculative response, it seems likely that even if the sales of such fiction decline, it is doubtful that the form will be completely abandoned. The techno-thriller is also closely related to survivalist fiction, and a work of survivalist fiction, *The Turner Diaries*, may have directly inspired the Oklahoma City bombing. Both Oklahoma City and the sales of the *Left Behind* series have demonstrated the power of the apocalyptic fictional argument. It is likely that it will continue to complement premillennialist nonfictional prophecy interpretation for the near future.

This is not to say that premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is a worrisome development in millennialist thought. The move to fiction may soften the apocalypse and deflate millennial tension, while the continuation of its nonfictional sources' tragic

fatalism and lack of genuine humor may exacerbate such tension. However, the opponents of the ideology which accompanies the premillennialist script will take little comfort that it is now expressed in what may be a rhetorically softer but potentially more effective medium.

The cross-over popularity of this genre may show that society at large still craves *prophetae*,¹²⁰ yet is too skeptical to tolerate them except in fiction. . It is worth considering whether these premillennialist apocalyptic fictions are acting as partial surrogates for the personal interaction and commitment in millennial mass movements, which other than perhaps the unfocused miscellany of million people marches are noteworthy for their absence thus far in the 2000-2001 time period. As O'Leary points out,

The purchase of a mass-market paperback at a supermarket checkout counter, the watching of a television evangelist or a rented film in one's living room, do not require a person to commit publicly to a church or sect; the increasing pluralization and secularization of American civic life have made such commitment largely irrelevant.¹²¹

We will have to wait to see whether the only millennial mass movements in American culture today are mass movements of consumption of fictional materials instead of action on millennial programs.

Part Two of this paper explores a completely different set of prophets from the premillennialists, who use fiction with comic outcomes and humor to deflate apocalyptic scenarios that might better resist nonfictional argument.

¹²⁰ This term is taken from Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 62.

¹²¹ O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 142-43.

APPENDIX ONE: OUTLINE OF PREDICTED EVENTS IN *THE LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH* AND RELATED WORKS

First, faithful Christians are taken away in the Rapture. Second, the Antichrist arises, usually connected to the European Community as a “second Roman Empire,” and makes a seven year treaty with Israel, which initiates the period known as the Tribulation and serves as a countdown clock to the Second Coming. The Antichrist is not recognized by the world as evil; instead, he is hailed for bringing peace. He is assassinated with a head wound, but is resurrected, and obtains world hegemony for 3 ½ years. Russia and the Middle East are central to the scenario. Russia, as the biblical “Gog,” attempts the destruction of Israel and the conquest of the Middle East, but its forces are destroyed in a nuclear strike fashion. The armies of the Antichrist battle against the kings of the East (an East Asian block), and the battle would consume the world if the Second Coming did not cut it off.

Throughout the Tribulation, the judgments described in Revelation (seals, trumpets and vials) decimate the earth and human kind. Much has been made of the resemblance of the judgments to ecological disasters, asteroid strikes, new diseases and the latest weaponry. 144,000 Jews (or perhaps others representing the missing 10 tribes) are sealed by God, and the two witnesses (perhaps Elijah and Moses) preach to the world from Jerusalem until they are killed by the Antichrist and resurrected by God. The Antichrist persecutes other believers and requires them to bear his mark (the proverbial “666”) in order to buy or sell anything.

APPENDIX TWO

FURTHER SUMMARIES OF PREMILLENNIALIST FICTION WORKS

1. *The Christ Clone* Trilogy.

The premise of this trilogy is in the title: a scientist is able to create a clone of Jesus from cells found on the Shroud of Turin. The fact that we now know the Shroud of Turin to have a medieval date is finessed. The plot, as the author himself put it, is that the “clone goes sour.”¹²² These books are an exception to the usual rule about undercharacterization of Antichrist. The character of Christopher as the “Christ Clone” is oddly compelling for this genre, and his arguments for New Age beliefs almost sound too good for a premillennialist script. Up until the last volume, the story is an almost straight telling from the bad guys’ perspective, and the good guy of the story remains the dupe of the Antichrist until only moments before his martyrdom. The strategy is rhetorically risky. The trilogy gives the New Age it’s best shot, and the horrible consequences become evident only in the last pages. A question difficult to answer for one already skeptical is whether such an approach steels believers against New Age influences, or creates doubt where doubt may not have existed before.

2. *The End of Days*

As only 8,951 volumes of this work have been sold,¹²³ it merits only brief consideration. The book commences as almost pure Tom Clancy without much religious discussion before clarifying into the standard endtime scenario. The setting is mostly Israel, and the protagonists (military men or members of the 144,000) are or become

¹²² Alex Heard and Peter Klebnikov, *Apocalypse Now. No, Really. Now!*, *The New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 27, 1998: 40, 43.

messianic Jews. The author believes in a post-tribulation Rapture. An original stroke has God blowing up Mars and Venus to create the asteroid bombardment for some of Revelation's judgments. Another original is that the two witnesses are the Apostles John and Philip, instead of the usual Moses and Elijah.

3. *Seal of Gaia.*

Marlin Maddoux's *Seal of Gaia* envisions a dystopia in the *Brave New World* and *1984* tradition from a premillennialist perspective. The dark future continues for several decades prior to the commencement of the Tribulation, thus the work is relatively grim even compared with others in the genre, and believers can take little comfort in the promise of the Rapture. The main character is, once again, a journalist reporter. *Seal of Gaia* is extremely focused on critiquing what it characterizes as New Age beliefs. The Ascended Masters of the New Agers are demons, the Gnostics of the Classical world were part of evil's plans. The computer armed with New Agish software becomes the vehicle for evil's conquest of humanity. A usual Illuminati style conspiracy theory is the foundation for society's turn to evil, and AIDs was part of the conspiracy (not, as sometimes ascribed by fundamentalists, part of God's judgment). Names are given with ham-handed symbolism: Ms. Rousseau is the name of the Antichrist's mother, Wallenberg is the name of good guy. In more specific statements on current issues, the book opposes socialized health care and appears to approve of guns.

4. *Flee the Darkness*

Grant Jeffrey and Angela Hunt's *Flee the Darkness* takes as its basis the relatively popular belief that computer Y2K problem would be the beginning of the end.

¹²³ Figure from publisher as of July 1999.

The twist is that it's not the massive computer crash, but the means of dealing with it, that serves the interest of the Antichrist. The protagonists are Daniel, a Bill Gates-style computer genius entrepreneur, and Lauren, a beautiful presidential aide, who both start as non-believers (at least in fundamentalist Christianity). Although the structure is techno-thriller, the book has a more than usual emphasis on the Christian romance features. The work finds its drama pre-Rapture: as Daniel says, "Until the Lord comes and we are snatched away, we're going to make life miserable" for the Antichrist.¹²⁴ This either indicated an unwillingness to indulge in a fictional apocalyptic orgy of destruction or a desire to write sequels.

5. *The Fourth Reich*

Despite its wild *Boys from Brazil* premise, only 42,845 copies of Robert Van Kampen's *The Fourth Reich* have been sold.¹²⁵ The book explains the resurrection of the Beast described in Revelation as the cloning of Hitler.¹²⁶ The protagonists are all Jews who are either converted to Christianity or deny their Jewish heritage completely and are damned. As usual, an implausible explanation is offered of why evil goes through the plan when it must know the results.

Besides the resurrected Hitler, one other notable novel plot element appears in this work: God launches a piece of lava into orbit to destroy the space shuttle. This aside implicitly acknowledges the problem of a future of an altered, expanded humanity on other worlds than this – what if the end of this planet ceases to correspond to

¹²⁴ Jeffrey, *Flee the Darkness*, 361

¹²⁵ Figure from publisher as of July 1999.

the end of human kind?¹²⁷ It seems an incredible stretch to say such a future is anticipated by prophecy, but such stretches have been made before.

6. Zinn's *The Unveiling*.

The Unveiling contains an extremely dark vision of active oppression of the church even prior to the rise of Antichrist. Usually, apocalyptic fiction postulates a Christianity grown apathetic against the eroding forces of the New Age and the modern world. In contrast, *The Unveiling* postulates a near, pre-tribulation future of extermination, physical and economic coercion and so forth. This work follows the Robertson view of a post-tribulation Rapture with the church whisked away to an earthly location.¹²⁸ The work is uncompromisingly fundamentalist; for example, it takes a hard line on only six thousand years of existence for creation. Some novel plot elements are that the Antichrist arises from within the evangelical leadership and that the 144,000 are all virgin birth children who are quickly removed to heaven to sit out the tribulation. The Antichrist is opposed within the church by Pastor Jack Mitchell and outside it by Cliff, a CIA agent. The outlook is particularly fatalistic: more of the main characters end up as martyrs than in other works. An overriding concern of this work, shared with others, is with the image of Christians in today's world.

¹²⁶ See Revelation 13:3. The author explains in an afterword that this and other passages indicate that the Antichrist could only be Hitler or Nero, without really explaining why not just Nero.

¹²⁷ Possibly related is humankind's failure to get to Mars in *The Illuminati*. Burkett, *The Illuminati*, 43.

¹²⁸ Zinn, *The Unveiling*, 268

7. Mahan's *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*

Mahan's *The Unveiling* contains descriptions of the origins and childhoods of its central characters lacking in other works, which actually are unnecessarily detailed, but on the other hand the focus on life histories helps to deal with the dramatic problem of the rapture of the main protagonists for good. The book is unusual in its specific homage to *The Late Great Planet Earth*¹²⁹ and its willingness to state by real names how the entire Republican leadership is raptured!¹³⁰ The work takes time for explicit criticism of Catholic theology¹³¹ and support of Star Wars.¹³² Given the rhetorical tone of this and other works of apocalyptic fiction, it is not surprising that paradise is where "There was no moment of fear, guilt, or shame."¹³³

8. *Apocalypse*.

Although this is a novelization of the first in a series of videos produced for the Van Impe ministry, it has some features worth noting as a book. Most important is the fact that it bears the stamp of approval of the Van Impe ministry, one of the most well known televised sources of biblical prophecy interpretation, and that it contains a foreword by Jack Van Impe discussed above. Accordingly, the plot includes product placement for a Jack Van Impe video. The novelization's opening reads like the ill constructed screenplay from whence it sprang: a completely disjointed anecdote by anecdote account of contemporary world tensions as if they all tied in to fulfillment of prophecy. A more than usual lack of realism pervades the plot. Kids from a Pleasantville

¹²⁹ Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 197

¹³⁰ Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 207 ff.

¹³¹ Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 278.

¹³² Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 433.

style neighborhood coexist with a government which has somehow “quietly reinstated the draft.”¹³⁴ The authors approve of fatalism at a time of ridiculous and seemingly readily resolvable international conflict.¹³⁵ On the other hand, the blankness of the character of the Antichrist is woven into plot, and there is perhaps too much honesty and realism for rhetorical purposes regarding fraudulent ministries. Extensive rapture accounts help fill the dramatic void, and the work has the surprisingly rare commodity of a knowledgeable Antichrist who knows scripture (yet still tries to give the standard UFO explanation for the Rapture). The novel ends at the beginning of Tribulation (just like *Seal of Gaia*), which leaves room for a series of sequel films.

The level of fatalism both of this work and the others in the genre is best summed up by the statement of an elderly mother to her journalist protagonist son: “The worse your news broadcasts, the closer we are to Jesus.”¹³⁶

9. *Escape from Armageddon*

One other small press publication, the Australian *Escape from Armageddon*, was most noteworthy only for its cover art, which shows someone much like the Pope burning in a lake of fire with someone much like Quaddafi. Again, Jews are the central protagonists in its version of the apocalyptic conflict.

¹³³ Mahan, *The Unveiling of End-Time Events*, 438.

¹³⁴ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 55

¹³⁵ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 61.

¹³⁶ Lalonde, *Apocalypse*, 31.

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