



Photos: Cloud Ten Pictures

humble. In contrast, most of the film professes to know all the answers. (A link from the movie's official Web site suggests, while playing the song "I'll Fly Away" and showing pictures of people flying to heaven out of the earth and sea, that here can be found true answers for anyone left behind after the secret rapture.)

I kept being grateful that my own denomination, although far too close for comfort at times to the film's theology, resists the film's premise: that humanity will experience the secret rapture prior to the great tribulation and return of Jesus Christ to Earth. Seventh-day Adventism offers alternative interpreta-

tions to the rapture. When Adventism proclaims that victory was already won at the cross, it avoids a theology that diminishes Christ. When Adventism shares a picture of a gracious God, evil forces diminish; God's victory far outweighs the power of evil. When Adventism takes Bible study seriously, the wonder of apocalyptic literature, symbolic language, and the social contexts of Revelation are explored.

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A Response by Readers

by Albert and Mabel Olson

Editor's Note

When Spectrum readers Albert and Mabel Olson told us that they had picked up the "Left Behind" books and ended up reading them with their Bibles open, checking facts as they went, we thought their comments about the video would interest other Spectrum readers.

There are now eight volumes in the "Left Behind" series of books published by Tyndale House Publishers. Left Behind, the title of the series and the first book, refers to the rapture, which forms the major event in the first book. The movie is only a sketchy version of the



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first book and seems to be an introduction to subsequent books in the series.

The books amply document the prophecies, though documentation obviously presented a challenge to the makers of the film. Although the story line the books follow is fictional, we believe that this work should be understood as a worthwhile attempt to place numerous biblical prophecies within the context of events that could take place during the last seven years of humanity's stay on earth.

The movie focuses on three major last-day events. The first is the bombing of Israel, thus suggesting that Israel has a role to play in last-day events. The sound crew obviously had a field day showing the attacking enemy air force dropping bombs that explode harmlessly in midair against the backdrop of the night sky, all of which leaves Israel unharmed.

Then the movie shows the main "left behind" event as it might appear in the United States. The righteous are instantaneously transported to heaven at night leaving behind whatever they happened to be wearing. That incident in itself makes an impressive scene, but the movie also uses other spectacular effects to show suffering on earth among those who remain. Imagine life proceeding at its usual pace when, all of a sudden, many people—airline pilots, truck drivers, and so forth—simply disappear. Let your imagination run wild!

The book depicts the rapture as a dramatic and catastrophic event. By contrast, the film version seems less intense. The book series uses the rapture to set up the concept of two classes of people, an important plot element in the movie. Although all the "righteous" have already gone, God continues his work and a small group of people in the movie answers his call. One unconverted assistant church pastor left behind

gets his life in order and launches an evangelistic program. A nucleus of people responds and accepts God's plan of salvation. This small group begins to carry out its work, facing increasing hostility from the larger group of the unconverted, who seek to eliminate brutally all of God's followers.

Finally, the movie depicts selection of the secretary general of the United Nations. The man chosen for this post was previously almost unknown. However, he shows a remarkably broad knowledge of international affairs and seems to be cultured and likeable. He assumes a major role in the books as the rest of the story unfolds.

We feel that the primary focus of the books and movie is evangelical. The humanizing of these prophecies in the form of a novel certainly drives one to "search the Scriptures" to see if the author's references and interpretations are correct. Many people to whom we have talked have read these books with their Bibles open, searching the texts as the story unfolds. On this basis, we feel that the books' writers have accomplished their purpose.

For the movie, an unusual distribution system has been devised that, in itself, is evangelical. The movie was first released through Christian bookstores and other retail outlets as a video to be sold, not rented. Its handlers hope that enough Christians will buy the video to watch it themselves and then become missionaries, going into the highways and byways to persuade others to show up in a theater to watch the film on a big screen.

Although we thought this was a good movie, after seeing the video and reading the book we probably will not see the theater presentation in February.

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