



JOEL C. ROSENBERG

# EPICENTER

2.0 VERSION: UPDATED & EXPANDED

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CHAPTER ONE:

# PREDICTING THE FUTURE

Few Americans will ever forget what they were doing on September 11, 2001, when they first heard the news that the United States was under attack by radical Islamic jihadists using jet planes on kamikaze missions. I certainly never will.

On that beautiful, sunny, crystal clear Tuesday morning, I was putting the finishing touches on my first novel, a political thriller called *The Last Jihad*, which opens with radical Islamic terrorists hijacking a jet plane and flying an attack mission into an American city. What's more, I was doing so in a town house barely fifteen minutes away from Washington Dulles International Airport, where American Airlines Flight 77 had just taken off. At that very moment, the plane was being seized and flown right over our home toward the Pentagon.

At the time, I had no idea anything unusual was under way. A literary agent in Manhattan had read the first three chapters of *Jihad* six months earlier. He was convinced that he could get it published and urged me to finish it as quickly as possible. Given that he worked for the agent who had discovered Tom Clancy back in the early 1980s, I took the advice seriously, working feverishly to get the book done before my savings account ran dry.

As had become my morning ritual, I had breakfast with my wife, Lynn, and our kids, threw on jeans and a T-shirt, and settled down to work on the novel's second-to-last chapter. I didn't have radio or television on. I was simply typing away on my laptop when, about an hour later, Lynn burst into the house and turned on the news. She quickly explained that after dropping off two of our kids at school, she had turned on the radio and heard that the World Trade Center had been hit by two planes. We turned on FOX News and saw the horror begin to unfold for ourselves.

We saw the smoke pouring out of the North Tower. We saw the constant replays of United Airlines Flight 175 plowing into the South Tower and erupting into a massive ball of fire. And then, before we could fully process it all, we saw the World Trade Center towers collapse.

People ask me what my first reaction was, but I don't recall thinking that my novel was coming true. I simply remember the feeling of shock. I had been to the top of the World Trade Center as a kid with my father, an architect who had grown up in Brooklyn and loved to show me the architectural landmarks of the city he loved. I had been at the top of the North Tower just a few weeks earlier for lunch at the Windows on the World restaurant. Now, before my eyes, these two testaments to man's engineering genius were gone, as were the lives of those trapped inside.

Then came the news that the Pentagon had been hit and word that the White House and the Capitol were being evacuated and rumors that *Air Force One* might be a target. Washington, the city that had become home for Lynn and me since our marriage in June of 1990, was suddenly under siege. Not a single commercial jet was in the air. Instead, fighter jets flew combat air patrols over the city. Troops were being deployed on the streets, along with armored personnel carriers, Avenger anti-aircraft missiles, and all kinds of military assets.

I remember calling friends at the White House and on Capitol Hill and my agent in New York, hoping for word that they were safe but unable to get through with so many phone lines jammed. I remember calling Steve Forbes at his office in Greenwich Village to see if he was

okay. Steve and I had worked together from 1996 through the 2000 Republican primaries and had traveled together to nearly forty states on almost every kind of plane imaginable, from a twin-engine prop over rural Georgia to a gleaming Gulfstream IV en route from Dallas to Newark to a series of jam-packed Southwest flights to who knows where. Was he on a commercial flight that morning? After repeated attempts to get through, I finally got his executive assistant on the line. Steve was safe, she said. He had been coming over one of the bridges into Manhattan when he actually saw the second plane hit. At that moment, his driver slammed on the brakes, spun the car around, and headed back to Steve's home.

Lynn and I got our boys back from school. Several friends came over to spend the day. We tracked events on television, e-mailed friends around the country and around the world with updates from Washington, and prayed for those directly affected by the crisis. We prayed for our president to have the wisdom to know what to do next. Were more attacks coming? Would there be a 9/12, a 9/13, a 9/14? Would there be a series of terrorist attacks, one after another, as Israel experienced for so many years?

It was not until sometime in late November or early December, I believe, that events began to settle enough for my thoughts to turn back to *The Last Jihad*. What was I supposed to do with it? My agent, Scott Miller at Trident Media Group in Manhattan, agreed that we could not very well send it to a New York-based publisher. We couldn't send it to *any* publisher. No one wanted a novel that opened with a kamikaze attack against an American city. It was no longer entertainment. It was too raw, too real. I stuck it in a drawer and tried to forget about it while I sought out new clients and tried to rebuild the communications-strategy company I had largely neglected for most of 2001.

And then something curious happened. My wife and I were watching the State of the Union address in January of 2002 when President Bush delivered his now-famous "axis of evil" line and warned Americans that the next war we might have to face could be with Saddam Hussein over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction:

Our second goal [after shutting down terrorist camps and bringing terrorists to justice] is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the eleventh. But we know their true nature. . . . Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens—leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. . . . States like these [including Iran and North Korea], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. . . . We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather.<sup>1</sup>

Lynn and I looked at each other as if we were living in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. It was one thing to write a novel that opened with a kamikaze attack against America that essentially comes to pass. But until that moment, few people had been talking publicly about the possible necessity of going to war with Iraq. Except me. You see, as the plot of *The Last Jihad* unfolds, the FBI and CIA trace the trail of terror back to Baghdad, and suddenly the president of the United States and his senior advisors find themselves in a showdown with Saddam Hussein over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Scott Miller called me the next day. “Do you work for the CIA?” he asked.

“No, of course not,” I assured him.

“Sure, sure,” he replied. “That’s what you’d have to say if you *did* work for the CIA and just couldn’t tell me.”

Scott was convinced that the dynamic had just changed dramatically. He believed publishers would now be very interested in *The Last Jihad*. The country had largely recovered from the initial shock of the 9/11 attacks. We were now on offense in Afghanistan against the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and the forces of Al-Qaeda. People were reading everything they could get their hands on regarding the threat of radical Islam. Audiences were responding positively to the new movie *Black Hawk Down*, which took them inside the incredibly brave lives of U.S. special forces units operating in radical Islamic environments. And there were no other novels in print or on the horizon that could take readers inside the Oval Office and White House Situation Room as an American president and his war council wrestled over the morality of going to war against the regime of Saddam Hussein. As such, Scott wanted to move quickly.

I have to admit I was surprised at first. By then I had largely written off any hope of ever publishing *Jihad*. But Scott had a point. Even the most established and successful thriller writers were wrestling through what this new War on Terror might look like and how their fiction should reflect the new geopolitical realities in which radical Islam—not Communism—had suddenly become the new enemy. And even if they had begun writing entirely new novels based on post-9/11 scenarios on September 12, Scott noted that it would still take well over eighteen months before their novels would hit the market. Mine was already done. Almost, anyway.

*Jihad* needed a few tweaks. For one thing, I needed to acknowledge that 9/11 had already happened. Why? Well, imagine yourself as an aspiring young writer in the spring of 1941 who wakes up one day thinking, *What if I write my first novel about a Japanese surprise attack on the United States that leads to a nuclear war between Washington and Tokyo?* Then imagine that on the very day you are finishing your novel, you hear the horrifying news about the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by the president of the United States describing December 7 as “a day that will live in infamy.” No matter how prescient your book might seem, it would be a little odd to publish your novel without at least letting your readers know that you were not

sleepwalking through history, that you understood that real life had suddenly become stranger than fiction.

This was essentially the scenario I found myself facing. I added a few lines into the first chapter explaining that the 9/11 attacks had happened during President Bush's tenure in office and the Taliban had been obliterated, but Iraq had not been dealt with directly (which at the time, of course, was true). I gave President Bush two terms in office and noted that Vice President Dick Cheney had no interest in running, thus positioning my fictional President James MacPherson to succeed Mr. Bush in 2009, just as America was beginning to catch its collective breath from the War on Terror. That, I hoped, would give readers a bit of real-world context as I invited them to slip into my fictional world—a world, as it turned out, that was about to be overtaken by actual events.

By February, Scott had a deal in place with Tor/Forge Books, a thriller imprint connected to St. Martin's Press, which scheduled *Jihad* for an April 2003 release. 2003? I should have been elated. After all, I had been dreaming about writing novels and screenplays since I was eight years old, and now I had my first book deal. But to be honest, I was more than a little concerned about getting the novel out before more of its story actually came to pass in the real world. A year is a lifetime in domestic politics and an eternity in geopolitics. A war with Iraq could be over by then. What interest would there be in a novel like mine *after* Saddam had been toppled from power?

Even after signing the contract, I continually had to remind myself that the New York publishing industry was a vastly different animal from the Washington political world I was so immersed in, that my editors were smart and capable people who knew what they were doing, that everything was going to be fine, and that patience was a virtue. It was all true, but irrelevant. By August of 2002, every molecule in my body was shaking with the conviction that regime change in Iraq would be complete before *Jihad* ever saw the light of day.

Reading between the lines of speeches and comments made by President Bush and senior administration officials and listening carefully to the nuanced comments made by my friends in the White

House and on Capitol Hill, I became convinced that President Bush was going to use his September 12 speech to the fall session of the United Nations General Assembly to lay down the gauntlet vis-à-vis Iraq. Nothing had been made public yet, and the sources I was using for my weekly column in *World* magazine steadfastly refused to confirm my instincts. But if I was right, I knew that a vote authorizing the use of force against Iraq could well come before Christmas.

The timing would be eerily similar to the chain of events in the fall of 1990 that had led President Bush 41 to begin major combat operations in Iraq and Kuwait on January 16, 1991. Could Bush 43 be looking at a January or February strike date? If he was, a ferocious national and international debate was imminent. The entire world would soon be wrestling with the morality of going to war with Iraq. The debate would likely reach a fever pitch by November and December, and fighting could break out soon thereafter.

On vacation with my family in Colorado, I called Scott back in New York and explained my sense of the geopolitical landscape. I asked if there was any way he could persuade our publisher to move up the release date. He was sympathetic and said he would take a run at it, but warned me not to get my hopes up. After all, the novel hadn't been printed yet. It hadn't even been edited. Or put in the publisher's catalog. The sales team wasn't yet aware it existed. No bookstores had committed to stocking it, nor had they even been approached. And that was just the beginning of hurdles that lay ahead.

A few days later Scott called me back. To his surprise, the publisher's top executives were intrigued with my analysis of the Iraq situation. They understood the stakes and were willing to do whatever was necessary to get the book to market, but it was not their decision alone to make. Even if they could physically produce books by November at the earliest, if they could not persuade at least one major book chain to stock it, the issue was moot.

What happened next could be a book in itself. But three quick points are important for our story: First, President Bush did, in fact, use his September 12 speech to lay down the gauntlet for Saddam and the international community. Second, my friend Sean Hannity graciously

agreed to have me on his radio and television show on the day of *The Last Jihad*'s release. And third, Barnes & Noble quickly agreed to stock the book for the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Hanukkah seasons.

They were taking a risk, to be sure. No one had ever heard of me or my book. And though I had helped a number of business, media, and political leaders with their books over the years, I had no sales record of my own. Still, with its "ripped from the headlines" feel and the promise of Sean Hannity's massive audience (some 10 million people) hearing about the book, *The Last Jihad* at least had a chance of finding an audience. Once B&N placed an order, other major stores and chains did too.

The publisher's decision to get the book out before the U.S. went to war with Iraq paid off. When *The Last Jihad* was released on November 23, 2002, the book caught fire. It sold out in most stores in less than twenty-four hours and prompted nine reprintings before Christmas. In less than sixty days, I was interviewed on more than 160 radio and TV talk shows, including Rush Limbaugh's. The questions were less about the novel itself than the story behind the novel. How could I possibly have written a novel that seemed to foreshadow coming events? Did I work for the CIA? Did I have friends at the Pentagon slipping me inside information? And far more important, what did my mysterious crystal ball say would happen next?

As media coverage surged, so did sales. *Jihad* quickly hit #1 on Amazon.com, #4 on the *Wall Street Journal* hardcover fiction best-seller list, and #7 on the *New York Times* list. It stayed on the *Times* list for eleven weeks. Was it a fluke? Did I get lucky? Or was there something else going on?

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## "MODERN NOSTRADAMUS"

In January 2003, my publisher asked if I would like to write another book.

*Sure*, I thought, *it beats working*. But I felt compelled to caution them that I could not guarantee a second novel would have the same "ripped from the headlines" feel as *Jihad*. After all, I would most likely be writing about events set *after* a U.S.-led war in Iraq, *after* the collapse

of Saddam Hussein's regime, and *after* the emergence of a democratic and pro-Western provisional government in Iraq. None of this had actually happened yet, nor was there any guarantee that any of it would ever happen. There were numerous diplomatic initiatives under way in Europe and the Arab world trying desperately to prevent a war, and President Bush himself was saying he hoped hostilities could be avoided.

Apparently unconcerned, the publisher gave me a green light to move forward with my second book.

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. did, in fact, launch a war against Iraq.

I turned in the manuscript of *The Last Days* in late July. When it was released on October 21, 2003, it quickly became a national best seller. But what intrigued people most was not the prose or the characters. It was the sense that *The Last Days*, like *The Last Jihad* before it, was somehow telegraphing future events.

The novel opens with the death of Yasser Arafat and an American president pushing for peace and democracy in the Middle East in the messy aftermath of a brutal war in Iraq. The first pages put readers inside a U.S. convoy filled with diplomats and CIA officials heading into Gaza as part of the peace process when it is suddenly attacked in a massive explosion.

On October 15, 2003, fiction seemed to morph into reality.

**“U.S. Convoy in Gaza Bombed”** read the *Haaretz* headline.

**“Explosion Targets CIA Convoy in Gaza”** read the *Jerusalem Post* headline.

“A massive explosion ripped apart a U.S. diplomatic vehicle Wednesday, killing three Americans and wounding one in the first attack on a U.S. target in three years of Israel-Palestinian fighting,” reported the Associated Press. “The attack was condemned by Palestinian officials who said those killed were members of a U.S. monitoring team sent to the region to supervise implementation of a U.S.-backed peace plan.”<sup>2</sup>

There was no way the terrorists could have used my book as a blueprint for their murderous plans. It did not hit bookstores for another six days. But the event triggered an avalanche of media interest.

Over the next few weeks, I did hundreds of radio, TV, and print interviews, including *CNN Headline News*, MSNBC, CBN, and the *New York Times*. *U.S. News & World Report* published a story describing me as a “modern Nostradamus.” Paul Bedard, the magazine’s political columnist, wrote:

It’s getting a little weird being Joel Rosenberg, the *New York Times* bestseller of terrorism thrillers and speechwriter in Steve Forbes’s 2000 presidential campaign. First, he wrote *The Last Jihad* about a terrorist’s kamikaze attack on a U.S. city and the subsequent hunt for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. That was well before 9/11. Now he has written *The Last Days*, which opens with a Palestinian attack on a U.S. convoy, just like what happened a few weeks back. And look out, Yasser Arafat: Rosenberg offs you on Page 28.<sup>3</sup>

A year later, Arafat was dead.

It happened November 11, 2004. I remember it distinctly, as I was in Turkey doing research for my next novel when I got a call from my publicist back in Washington. No sooner had news of Arafat’s death hit the wires than he had a stack of interview requests from radio talk-show hosts who had interviewed me when *The Last Days* was published. They were convinced the book was coming true and were curious to know what I thought would happen next.

What would the post-Arafat world look like? Could a moderate, pro-democratic, pro-Western leader now emerge, someone able and willing to make peace with Israel? Or would radical Islamic jihadists seize control of the West Bank and Gaza? Or were the Palestinians doomed to suffer a bloody civil war as various factions battled it out for supremacy?

I spent the rest of the day doing U.S. radio interviews from the phone in my hotel room, noting that any one of those scenarios was possible, but that the first thing to watch for was the outbreak of internecine violence and the emergence of an atmosphere of chaos.

In *The Last Days*, a fictional CIA expert sends a top-secret e-mail enti-

tled “Possible Palestinian civil war erupting” to the president. He warns that the “battle to succeed Arafat could be brutal” and urges top administration officials to “watch for PLO factions to mobilize” against one another. As the novel unfolds, the warnings come to pass, top Palestinian officials are assassinated, and the West Bank and Gaza sink into anarchy.

Once again, fiction soon became fact. On November 14, the Associated Press reported that “militants firing assault rifles burst into a mourning tent for Yasser Arafat . . . just moments after the arrival of the Palestinian leader’s temporary successor, Mahmoud Abbas, forcing security guards to whisk him away to safety. The shooting, which killed two security guards and wounded six other people, raised grave concerns about a violent power struggle in the post-Arafat era.”<sup>4</sup>

The next day an Asian news service ran this headline: “**Civil War Looms over Palestine after Arafat’s Death.**” An Israeli news service ran a headline that read “**Rival Gangs Violently Vie for Control in PA**” [Palestinian Authority].<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the week, Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei was demanding that “armed chaos must cease. Armed demonstrations must cease. Everybody must respect law and order.”<sup>6</sup> But few were listening.

In the end, several years of chaos played into the hands of Hamas, which took over the Palestinian Authority in January 2006, not long after President Bush decided to make democracy in the Middle East the centerpiece of his second-term agenda.<sup>7</sup>

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### “A LITTLE EERIE”

My third political thriller was *The Ezekiel Option*.

Picking up where *The Last Days* left off, it centered on a dictator rising to power in post-Soviet Russia. Iran is feverishly trying to acquire nuclear weapons. Then Russia and Iran begin to form a military alliance—a nuclear alliance—with a coalition of Islamic countries who unleash an apocalyptic attack against Israel, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war.

*The Ezekiel Option* was set for release on June 27, 2005, this time

from Tyndale House Publishers. But Sean Hannity, who had asked me to be on his radio program the day it launched, as he had for both of my other novels, was leaving for vacation that week. He asked if I could reschedule the interview for Friday, June 24. Grateful for his continuing support, I readily agreed and we set the interview for 5:30 p.m. eastern. My public-relations team quickly booked additional radio interviews for me following Hannity, and Tyndale made June 24 the new official launch date. What caught everyone off guard, however, was the series of events that would unfold that particular day.

“It’s a little eerie, Joel,” Sean said as the interview began, noting that my past two novels had “run parallel with modern events” and that I was scaring him with the plotline of this new one. “So Saddam’s gone. Arafat’s dead. An American president and his advisors are pushing hard for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. All hell is breaking loose around the world, and a dictatorship begins rising out of Russia. Well, what’s the news about Vladimir Putin today?”<sup>8</sup>

Sure enough, just before we went on the air, Matt Drudge posted a link to a breaking Associated Press story out of Moscow: **“Putin Amendment May Allow Third Term.”**

According to the story, legislative allies of the Russian president were “considering an electoral amendment next week that could open the way for [Putin] to run for a third term, prompting the opposition to accuse his supporters of trying to cling to power.” The article went on to say that “speculation has been rife that Putin would seek to stay in power beyond 2008” and noted that “during his time in power, Putin has placed national television under effective state control, abolished the direct election of regional governors to make them virtual Kremlin appointees, and eliminated the right of independent lawmakers to run for parliament.”<sup>9</sup>

I summarized the AP story for the listening audience, then said, “You know, Sean, I was in Moscow last fall doing research for this novel, and I met with top Russian officials, U.S. Embassy officials, and Russian political analysts, and I asked them, ‘Do you believe that Putin is going to leave office in 2008?’ Every single one of them said yes—yet each of them had just spent the last hour convincing me of all the differ-

ent things Putin was doing to consolidate power. Now, my character [in *Option*] is not Putin. But he feels like Putin, and I think there's an interesting question whether Putin is really a friend of the United States. I know that President Bush has looked into his soul [and found him trustworthy]. I think, though, the president—to be fair—is reevaluating that right now because Putin has been allowing nuclear technology to be sold to Iran, the worst terror state on the planet.”

“Well, that’s part of your book, too,” Sean pointed out. “You write about a dictatorship rising in Russia and Iran feverishly pursuing nuclear weapons. . . . I don’t know where you get all this from. You’ve got, like, a blessing over your head because every time you write a book it just seems to fit in with modern events, and that happened with your last two novels and now it’s happening here.”

He was referring to the fact that on the exact same day, a radical Islamic hard-liner named Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had just won a landslide victory to become president of Iran, vowing to build a “powerful Islamic society,” defy Israel and the United States, and accelerate Iran’s bid to become a nuclear power.<sup>10</sup> Western government officials and political analysts were both stunned and alarmed by Ahmadinejad’s rapid rise to power and the implications of his victory for regional security.<sup>11</sup>

But not the Kremlin. Putin immediately congratulated the new Iranian president-elect and said Moscow was eager to continue selling nuclear technology and research facilities to Tehran. “The construction of the Bushehr nuclear plant [in Iran] is near an end, and we are ready to continue cooperation with Iran in the nuclear energy sphere,” Putin said in a letter to Ahmadinejad released by the Kremlin, adding that the development of Russian-Iranian nuclear ties “contributes to global peace and stability.”<sup>12</sup>

## SADDAM’S NOVEL, AND MINE

If all this were not “coincidence” enough for one day, a new story out of Amman, Jordan, suddenly popped up on the Associated Press wires with a headline that read “**Novel Written by Saddam to Be Published.**”<sup>13</sup> Curious, I scanned the article and was stunned to learn that

Saddam had actually finished writing a political thriller on March 18, 2003, just one day before coalition forces invaded Iraq.

To be sure, Saddam's title was punchier than mine—*Get Out, Damned One*. But the parallels between our two novels were curious, to say the least. Not only had Saddam written about an apocalyptic war in the Middle East in which a coalition of Arab Muslims square off against the Jews and the Christians, but the central character of his novel was a Jew named Ezekiel, and the novel was coming out the same week as my own. "The story is apparently a metaphor about a Zionist-Christian plot against Arabs and Muslims," noted the AP. "Ezekiel is meant to symbolize the Jews."

Michael Reagan asked me about the story when I appeared on his nationally syndicated radio show later that night. He had previously praised *The Last Days*, calling it "a gutsy new breed of political thriller—almost prophetically forecasting what you'll read in tomorrow's headlines." But this was surreal. It was one thing to release a novel about the rise of a Russian dictator forming a nuclear alliance with Iran on the very day the world was discussing Vladimir Putin's latest power grab and the election of an Iranian hard-liner vowing to go nuclear with Russian technology. But it was quite another thing to be publishing mirror-opposite novels with the likes of the Butcher of Baghdad.

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## FICTION OR REALITY?

I should note here that my novels do not precisely match the events that have actually unfolded in real life. While *The Last Jihad*, for example, does open with a kamikaze attack on an American city, my fictional terrorists use a private business jet rather than commercial jumbo jets, and they fly their murderous mission into Denver, not the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. Likewise, while *The Last Days* does open with the death of Yasser Arafat, in the novel he is assassinated, while in real life it is believed he died of natural causes. Moreover, in the novel, Mahmoud Abbas is assassinated as well, rather than succeeding Arafat as the head of the Palestinian Authority, as he did in real life.

That said, however, these and other differences between fact and

fiction have not seemed to dampen people's interest in my novels. To the contrary, each new political earthquake in the Middle East and Russia has spurred even more interest. By the end of 2005, I had given hundreds of media interviews. I had addressed audiences of CEOs, university students, church groups, and foreign diplomats in more than two dozen cities across the U.S., Canada, and the Middle East. I'd even delivered a talk on politics, prophecy, and the last days at the White House. And book sales soared.

When you write your first novel, you just hope your parents can find a copy at a bookstore within a hundred miles of their house. But suddenly there were more than one million copies of these novels in print. Thousands more were being printed in Holland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey, with Hebrew, Russian, and Romanian editions in development. The books had spent month after month on the *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-seller lists.

"How are you doing this?" people wanted to know. "Is there a secret formula? Do you have a crystal ball? And what do you think is going to happen next?"

The *Dallas Morning News* called me "eerily prophetic." A *Washington Times* profile said my novels felt "ripped from the headlines—tomorrow's headlines." A radio talk-show host in Las Vegas said, "Your books are amazing. They're uncanny. It's like you can predict the future. Could you come out to Vegas to do a book signing and then help people with the blackjack tables?" (I politely declined.) And nearly every radio host would begin the interview by citing the *U.S. News & World Report* story calling me a "modern Nostradamus."

The truth, of course, is that I am neither a psychic nor a clairvoyant. I do not call Miss Cleo in the middle of the night to get my plot ideas. But it isn't luck—dumb, blind, or otherwise. There is a reason these books seem to have predicted the future. There is a way to connect the dots, to anticipate future headlines, and in the chapters ahead, I will explain what is coming, how I know, and why it matters.

But first I want to share with you some background on how I was originally introduced to a 2,500-year-old prophecy that seems to be coming to fulfillment before our eyes.