Plotting Apocalypse: Reading, Agency, and Identity in the Left Behind Series

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It is the not-too-distant future, and the rapture has occurred. Every born-again Christian on the planet has, without prior warning, been snatched from the earth to meet Christ in the heavens, while all those without the requisite faith have been left behind to suffer the wrath of the Antichrist as the earth enters into its final days.

This is the premise that animates the enormously popular cultural phenomenon that is the Left Behind series of prophecy novels, co-written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins and published between 1995 and 2007. But these books are more than fiction: it is the sincere belief of many evangelicals that these events actually will occur--soon. *Plotting Apocalypse* delves into the world of rapture, prophecy, and tribulation in order to account for the extraordinary cultural salience of these books and the impact of the world they project. Through penetrating readings of the novels, Chapman shows how the series offers a new model of evangelical agency for its readership. The novels teach that although believers are incapable of changing the course of a future that has been preordained by God, they *can* become empowered by learning to read the prophetic books of the Bible--and the signs of the times--correctly. Reading and interpretation become key indices of agency in the world that Left Behind limns.

Plotting Apocalypse reveals the significant cultural work that Left Behind performs in developing a counter-narrative to the passivity and fatalism that can characterize evangelical prophecy belief. Chapman's arguments may bear profound implications for the future of American evangelicalism and its interactions with culture, society, and politics.

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