

The Kings of Christian Pulp Fiction

Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye made millions from the Left Behind book series, but success surprised them.

Tim LaHaye has been a successful author, minister and prophecy teacher for more than 50 years. But even he was surprised at the phenomenal success of the Left Behind series. The author of many nonfiction books, LaHaye was unsure he could take his idea for an end-times novel and turn it into something that would grab the hearts of Christians and non-Christians alike.

“I prayed for a number of years and talked to many people and publishers looking for a fiction writer,” LaHaye told *Charisma*. “I had the feeling this was a dynamic story and didn’t want it to suffer from inferior writing.”

“He actually had someone write a manuscript, talked to other writers and even asked Frank Peretti [to write it], to my understanding,” says co-author Jerry B. Jenkins. “That would have been quite a combination!”

But when LaHaye and Jenkins met through the pair’s literary agent, Rick Christian, the two authors “hit it off right away,” Jenkins says. Christian suggested that the two team up to put LaHaye’s idea for a fiction book based on the rapture down on paper. So began their somewhat nontraditional way of collaborating.

Although both men contribute to the books, they are not true co-authors. Instead, Jenkins creates the characters, designs the plots and writes the novels based on LaHaye’s biblical research and expertise, including the prophecies and their chronology.

“About 15 years ago, I was given the idea of what if the

rapture happened on a 747 and a third of the people were snatched out of it," LaHaye says, explaining that the idea originally hit him while he was on an airline flight. "You would know it couldn't be a human thing; it would have to be supernatural."

LaHaye says he then saw a handsome captain come out of the pilot's cabin and flirt with a cute flight attendant. He noticed that the pilot wore a wedding ring, and his imagination pictured the pilot with a Christian wife, then pictured him realizing too late that her tales of the second coming were all true.

"I was impressed with the fact that he wasn't going to try to write it or co-write it," Jenkins says of the idea for the partnership. "I don't think you can co-write fiction. But he has become the greatest resource a novelist can have."

The authors say the series was originally going to be only a single book but quickly grew into a series that covers the seven-year span of the tribulation. The series is scheduled to reach 12 titles by its completion in 2003.

"I got halfway through the first book and realized I had only covered a week," Jenkins says. "Halfway through the second, I realized that three wasn't going to do it. Then it became six, then seven, then 12."

Jenkins and LaHaye so far have reaped the profits of 25 million units sold, though they declined to name exact figures. And they have become household names, appearing in People magazine and on a variety of TV talk shows. But they say their lives have not really changed with the sudden windfall.

"In many ways it hasn't changed my life," Jenkins says. "I am doing what I have always done, which is write books. While the income is admittedly stratospheric, we were comfortable before Left Behind."

Jenkins says the extra income has given him more freedom to include his family in his travels and to be more generous in his giving. LaHaye continues his speaking engagements and enjoys time with his wife of 52 years, Beverly, who is also an author, speaker and founder of the Concerned Women for America organization. They have four children and nine grandchildren.

Adds LaHaye: "We are just very blessed, so this is just the icing on the cake."