

Clayton's article hard to digest by Joseph J. Wheeler

Michael Clayton shouldn't write about Antichrists. It's bad for the digestion.

Last Tuesday his piece on the Antichrist appeared. Last Tuesday afternoon I was eating lunch in the Student Union when my very strange friend Fergus showed up.

The expression on his thin face made my Personal Pan Pizza appear positively handsome.

He sat down and stared at me. He looked unusually tense, even for him. "You read that opinion piece by Michael Clayton?" he asked.

"Yeah, what about it?"

Fergus looked around nervously. "Clayton was wrong."

I shrugged while hoisting a triangle of pizza towards my mouth. "Hey, the guy writes commentary. There are always some people who think he's wrong."

"What he wrote about...about the Antichrist..." Fergus looked around again. An elderly woman in a red shirt began cleaning the table next to us. He waited until she had trundled off before saying, "He's wrong. I know the truth!"

I reached for slice number two. "About what?"

"The truth about the !" Fergus hissed through clenched teeth. "the Prince of Darkness. The Beast. 'He That Is Called Perdition'." Fergus must have noticed a blank look from my direction. "The Antichrist. The guy from The Omen, for God's sake!"

"The who?"

"Don't you know what I'm

talking about? The Son of Satan!" Fergus said.

I nodded while chewing. "Didn't they give him the death penalty?"

Fergus appeared confused. "Who?"

"The Son of Satan."

He shook his head. "Nooo. That was the Son of Sam. This is the Beast."

I reached for my napkin and a swallow of Pepsi. "Hey, the Beast—? I've heard about him. Isn't that the wrestler they arrested last week?"

Fergus looked kind of green. "The what? Wrestler?!"

"Yeah," I said. "They busted him in Georgia. He body-slammed a nun during a children's benefit."

Fergus pulled his chair far too near my own. His breath smelled of faded eggs and Bosco sucked straight from the can. "You're not listening. I'm trying to tell you about the Bible."

"The Bible?"

He pointed a finger to indicate Heaven. Or did he mean the restroom upstairs?

He didn't bother to explain. "In the Book of Revelation the Prophet John said that he saw a Beast. The Beast came out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads," Fergus struck an awkward pose that was meant to convey something dreadful rising out of the sea.

At least that was what I thought it meant. He could have had gas.

"Wow. I think I saw a movie

like that once," I said.

"You did?" he looked surprised.

"Yeah. I remember it now. What was it called?" I pulled on my straw absently and rummaged through a mental checklist of old monster movies. "...Gidrah, the Three Headed Monster!"

Fergus moaned under his breath. "Joe, there's no real monster. It's symbol. A symbol for the restored Roman Empire. The Antichrist is supposed to restore the ancient Roman Empire."

I laughed. "Are you serious?! I studied Italian politics in a class. They couldn't restore a piece of furniture, let alone an empire."

Fergus was becoming louder with frustration. "Well, that's what the Bible says! Besides, it's not the actual Roman Empire. The Restored Roman Empire will be the European Common Market."

I had only caught part of what he said. "Did you say 'Common Market?' Or was that 'Condom market?'"

He let out a stifled groan. "Common Market! Common, common, common! 1992 and all that? You've heard of the Common Market, haven't you?"

Fergus nodded briskly. "The Antichrist will first appear as the head of the Common Market. He'll then take over the world, declare himself God, and personally kill off a couple of billion people!"

I sprinkled more cheese on my remaining two pieces. "That's a

bunch of people, man. makes Rambo look sorry, eh?"

"That's right," Fergus grinned. "And by his side, the Antichrist will have the False Prophet."

"The what?"

"The False Prophet. The Antichrist will unite with this man. The False prophet will probably be a religious leader of some sort."

"Oh, I get it. Sort of like a tag-team thing, eh?"

Fergus tapped the table top for emphasis. "Between the two of them, the world isn't supposed to survive."

I let out a whistle. I had meant it to sound like I was impressed, but between the Pizza and Pepsi it sounded more like I'd sprung a leak.

Fergus didn't notice. "The Antichrist will finally be killed off in the battle of Armageddon. You know where that is?"

"Army-gedd—?"

"Armageddon. It's in Israel. I looked it up. It's a valley."

I nodded. "That's good to know, I guess. I mean, if you're looking for the really unusual vacation spot."

Fergus grinned. "Yeah. Well, that's all I wanted to tell you. I think it's great that Michael Clayton is spreading the word about the Antichrist. Everyone should be on the look-out, y'know?"

I nodded again. "I'll keep my eyes peeled."

Fergus got up. "Say, Joe..." he began.

I thought about an escape at-

tempt but sat there smiling instead. "Yeah, Fergus?"

His voice lowered into a somber tone. "You believe in the Antichrist, don't you?"

"Me? Well...I..." I tried to recall what Fergus had told me about the guy. It had already started to blur and became more opaque as I scrambled after it.

The Antichrist—? Oh yeah. Some guy who restores furniture in Rome...a religious guy with false profits...a bunch of people vacationing in Israel...

I opted for the diplomatic approach. I took in the entire Student Union with a gesture. "Doesn't everyone?"

Fergus looked around at the half empty tables. Since no one disagreed with me, he seemed satisfied. I inwardly thanked God the place was nearly deserted.

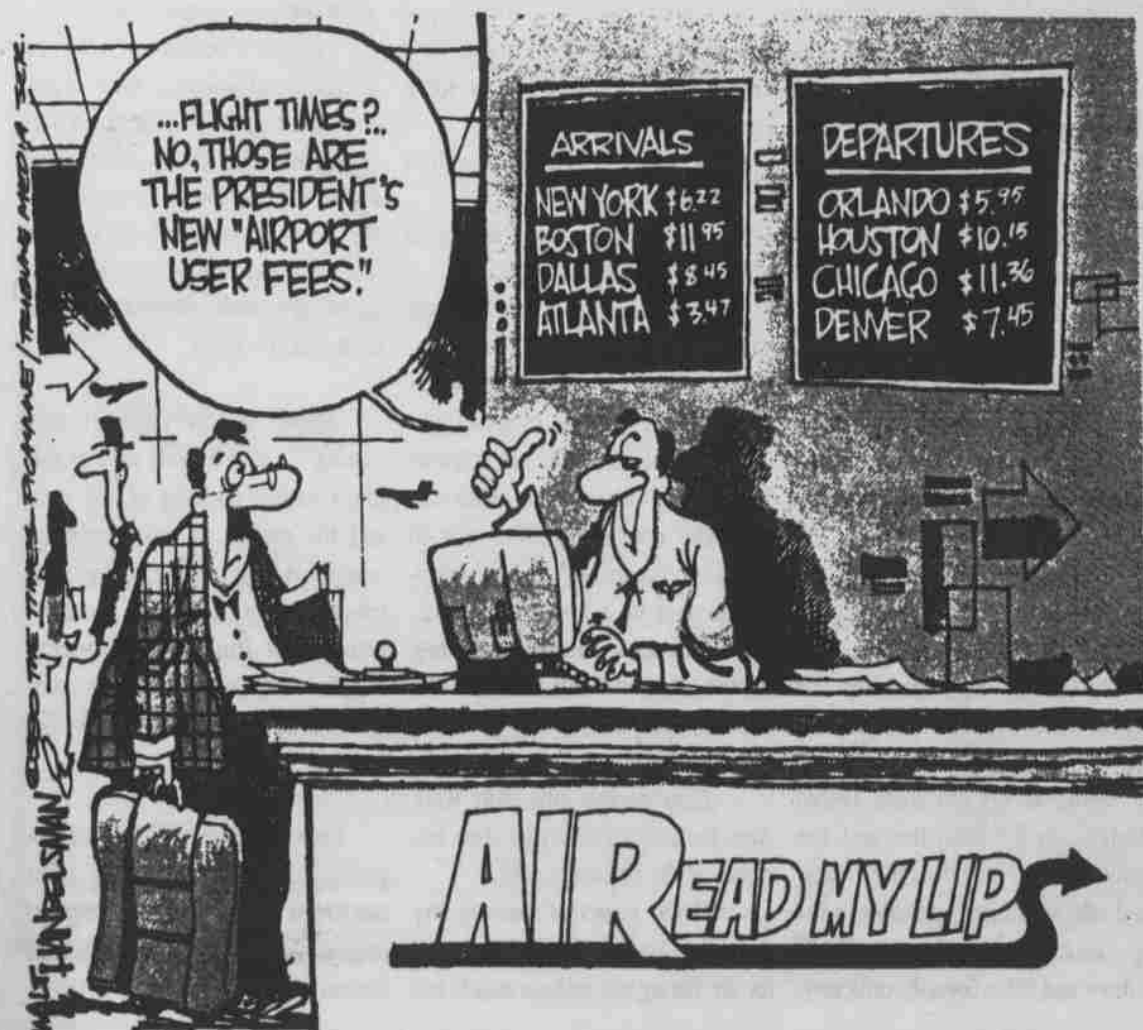
Fergus nodded solemnly as I gave him the thumbs-up signal. He turned to go, but paused.

"Joe, thank Michael Clayton for me, alright?"

I agreed as Fergus walked away. Reaching for my last slice of pizza I found it to be quite cold. It was of no great loss, as my appetite was long gone.

Yeah, I thought. I'll thank Michael Clayton for writing about Antichrists. Just as soon as he buys the lunch he now owes me.

Wheeler is a reporter intern for the Yellin' Rebel.



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All inquiries should be sent to The Yellin' Rebel, MSU 302, 4505 S. Maryland Pkwy, Las Vegas, NV 89154.

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