**PROLOGUE**

The first indication the world we know was about to end eluded the world’s most alert seismologists. In the earth’s upper and lower crusts, where massive tectonic plates slide across one another, their jagged edges sometimes catching and grinding, a mild movement caused the earth above to quake.

As people slept in Japan, the massive Ring of Fire plate shifted ever so slightly over its entire breadth from the Pacific Rim to Chile to New Zealand. That shift caused just a burp in the seismograph charts.

The second clue might have forewarned a veteran of seismic monitoring.

As Starbucks-infused Seattleites hurried to work early to beat the morning rush, the small Juan de Fuca tectonic plate off the coast of Washington and Oregon suddenly plunged obliquely beneath the North America plate. A cough erupted on seismometers.

The third signal? As soccer players in Liverpool, England, practiced in the late-afternoon sun, the Eurasian plate nosedived below the eastern edge of the North American plate. At that point even sleepy-eyed scientists jerked awake with a jolt.

In places little known for earthquakes, something ominous, something dreadful was about to tear apart the earth. By now, time had run out for seismologists to warn the masses. Some called home to warn their families. But escape the carnage? That was another matter.