

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF WISDOM HUNTER

RANDALL ARTHUR



A NOVEL

**JORDAN'S
CROSSING**

"Finally someone who understands that most religious trappings do not enhance faith but actually undermine it!"

—Wayne Jacobsen, publisher of *The Shack*

RANDALL ARTHUR

A NOVEL

**JORDAN'S
CROSSING**



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

DEDICATED...

to Sherri, Heidi, Shanda, Flora, and Jan—
the five wonderful ladies in my life
and to the people of the BIBC, who actively encouraged me
during times of uncertainty.

A THOUSAND THANK-YOUS...

to the Multnomah editors for their editorial artistry;
to the several test readers of the first-draft manuscript
who provided objective criticism;
to the various Atlanta hospitals and law enforcement agencies
for helpful information;
and finally, to Bill and Marian for their special favor.

OF INTEREST...

Flint Konserne in Bad Tolz, Germany,
officially closed on July 15, 1991.
McGraw Konserne in Munich closed in the summer of 1992.
The Bad Aibling station in Bad Aibling
closed on September 30, 2002.

From the Author

Almost two decades ago, my first novel, *Wisdom Hunter*, was born, not out of a long-held ambition to write a best-selling novel, but from a personal need to write the things I learned and experienced as a young, legalistic missionary in Europe. A few years later, *Jordan's Crossing* was also born out of a therapeutic need to put into writing some new lessons I'd learned. This time, though, the lessons were ascertained in the far left corner of liberalism.

At the age of thirty, in the midst of a very fruitful ministry overseas, I lost my heart for everything that was good. I lost my heart for being a husband, father, missionary, and pastor. Over a two year period I made a complete swing from the legalistic right to the liberal left. I ceased to function with any "heart." I became a mere machine. I did not know who I was anymore or what I believed. There was a part of me that wanted to run away to another country and take on a new identity, chase dreams, and not believe in anything except myself. But I was afraid to run too far.

I shut down emotionally for several years. During that time, I nearly ruined my marriage and my ministry. Only because of God's gracious intervention—through unexpected encounters, miracles, and conversations—did my life begin to turn around. Eventually, my marriage and ministry were salvaged. And so was my sanity.

Jordan's Crossing incorporates many of the feelings I experienced during those years of "faithlessness" when I swung to the far left and became extremely liberal in my philosophy and world view. The

book was written to illustrate in a true-to-life drama just how destructive a life can become when one's perspective is totally skewed by liberal thinking. With no anchor. And no truth.

In a day when a culture war between conservatism and liberalism rages throughout our nation, perhaps the re-release of *Jordan's Crossing* will prompt some needed introspection.

If you have already read *Jordan's Crossing* and are a fan, I say, "Thank you." I am both humbled and honored. May we always be tuned to God's Truth and never lose our heart for what is right and good.

If you are reading *Jordan's Crossing* for the first time, I hope it will be a thought-provoking read. I pray that it will stir an unquenchable thirst in your soul for everything that is true and good; challenge you to forgive those who have hurt you; and inspire you to strengthen, nurture, and love your family.

From my heart to yours,
Randall Arthur

◆ PART 1

1991

1

In a lower-class Chicago high-rise, Ricardo Alvarez jabbed the switchblade into his desktop, gouging out splintered chunks of pine and flicking them onto the floor. He hoped his mother would come into his room at any second, see what he was doing, and start yelling at him.

He gripped the switchblade tighter. Let her yell. It would give him an excuse to scream and curse right back at her.

She had just informed him that she was going to marry the crew-cut, nonsmiling Special Forces soldier she had been dating. At the thought of it, Ricardo plunged the knife again, prying loose a silver-dollar-sized piece of wood. She was nothing but a cheap barfly, Ricardo decided. He might as well be an orphan. She had never cared about his feelings. *Never*. She knew he couldn't stand the sight of the jarhead jerk she was dating—but did it matter? No! Not to her.

He snarled as he twisted the blade back and forth in the top of the desk.

He'd heard them talking through the thin wall that separated his bedroom from the living room. He'd heard Mitchum—that was the Green Beret's name—talk about the fact that he was being transferred to Germany. He'd heard the louse ask his mother if Germany was okay with her. "Sure," she'd said, with a drunken giggle.



Ricardo raised the knife high above his head. Did anybody think to ask what *he* thought about going to Germany? Did anybody care at all what a sixteen-year-old guy with friends of his own felt about being jerked halfway around the world with a mother who stayed drunk and a stepfather he couldn't stand?

He thrust the knife into the desk, wishing this time that the blade were striking something besides unfeeling wood.

At 11:30 P.M., Jordan Rau stood in the dark, staring out the living-room window of his family's fifth-floor Munich apartment at the empty, mist-shrouded streets below. It was late and he was tired, but the nagging frustrations in his mind kept him from going to bed.

For the first time in weeks, he was wondering if he had done the right thing. This particular evening, like many others during the last month and a half, had been a miserable one for his family, filled with arguments, shouts, and short tempers. His wife and children had finally marched off to their bedrooms to be left alone.

What's wrong with them? Jordan asked himself as he glimpsed the dark outlines of Grunwalder Stadium, four blocks away. *Why can't they be reasonable?*

Evidently he was the only one who could understand the logic of moving here from Chattanooga. After all, the financial incentives were too significant to pass up: The mission board was guaranteeing them a monthly salary that was a full 50 percent more than he had been paid by his church in Tennessee. Not to mention the generous medical benefits package—no small consideration, in light of their son's epilepsy.

Despite his annoyance, a tiny smile came to his lips as he thought about Chase. The seventeen-year-old had, against all odds, found his first girlfriend—here, in Germany. Her name was Heather Anne Moseley, and she was a classmate at the Department of Defense high school for American military dependents. This friendship alone was enough to justify the move, as far as Jordan was concerned. For the first time in many years, his son—his pride and joy—was taking an active interest in life, an interest that was perhaps strong enough to pull him beyond the reclusiveness and caution that the epilepsy had forced on him since childhood.

Then Jordan thought of Susan, his wife—and frowned again. She didn't share his enjoyment of Chase's budding romance, or of anything else related to the move. Since the day the letter came from the mission board announcing the opportunity for this overseas project, she had planted her heels in opposition. Again, Jordan replayed their conversation—the same conversation that had consistently surfaced, with minor variations, since he began talking about the possibility of making the move:

“Why do we have to move so far away?” she would demand. “Is it just the high salary? Is that the reason? If it is, I'll get a full-time job. We can use my paycheck to pay back the bank loan. We don't have to go all the way to Germany just to recover from our debt!”

At this point in the exchange, Jordan usually became annoyed. Susan insistently played up their financial difficulties, tacitly declaring that Jordan's only motivation was “money.” True, the debt was bothersome, but that was hardly—

“And another thing,” she would continue. “If it were just the two of us, maybe I could handle the move. But doesn't it matter to you that Chase is just now, after nine years, starting to feel



comfortable with his peers in Chattanooga? Doesn't it matter to you that we have a thirteen-year-old daughter who needs her friends right now? And doesn't it matter to you that your church doesn't want to give you up as their pastor?"

Jordan sighed. On and on it went. Susan just couldn't seem to understand the opportunities opening up in this part of the world for their denomination. The emotional insecurities that she felt for herself and for the children were blinding her. She wasn't comprehending the importance that the denomination was attaching to their specially selected five-family team: a team set up, along with four other joint teams specializing in various Eastern European languages, to staff the new seminary their denomination was building in Leipzig, Germany.

She couldn't grasp anything of the vision, not even when he tried to describe it for her. Whenever he tried to be persuasive, she would badger him with her simplistic, timeworn phrases that were always shrouded in a cloak of religious respectability:

"Jordan, I just can't see that this move is God's will. I know it's something *you* want; but are you sure it's something *He* wants? Have you even prayed about it?"

Turning away from the window, he rubbed his face in irritation. Susan and her narrow-minded evangelical upbringing... She couldn't seem to outgrow it, not even after all these years. To Susan, God's will was a black-and-white immutable fact, unique for each individual, and something that could be unmistakably determined if a person only prayed hard enough for long enough. But if Jordan had learned anything during his time in seminary, it was that God's purposes for man were not so easily understood or defined. Of course, he knew Susan wasn't completely at fault for

her lack of religious sophistication. She had only inherited the naive tenets that her parents had drummed into her since birth. For her, Christianity wasn't something to be critically analyzed and sifted. It was rather a whole list of beliefs that had to be accepted in their entirety without serious or creative questioning. In a way, though, he knew that this was what had drawn him to Susan in the first place: She was like an easy-believing child, sweet and unpretentious. Yet, as he had learned through twenty years of marriage, her simple way of thinking could also lend itself to unreasonableness and stubbornness.

Jordan stretched his six-foot-four, 245-pound frame and turned toward the bedroom. He realized that people like Susan sometimes had to be pushed against their wills like children, until they saw the light. That's what he had to keep doing, he decided.

He knew this move was right. He'd just have to maintain his course until Susan was as convinced as he was.

Lying in bed alone, trying in vain to fall asleep, Susan Rau felt swallowed by an unshakable emptiness swirling around her. Like tireless animals of prey, the difficulties of her uprooted life continued to stalk her, denying her the rest she so badly needed.

Since the day her family stepped from the plane at the Munich airport, nothing had gone right for them.

It had taken an unexpected seven weeks to find a place to live. The large number of East Germans now moving freely into the West was creating a severe housing shortage. Their mission board had somehow missed this detail.

Jordan had not been allowed to collect their car or any of their



household goods from customs until they had first acquired a permanent address and a residence permit. Before finding their apartment, they were forced to live out of their suitcases at a German *Gasthaus* twenty-three miles outside of Munich. Susan had felt isolated—trapped.

Chase was late in starting his senior year at the American Department of Defense high school in Munich. He was struggling to adjust and to catch up.

Their daughter, Donica, also starting late, was not adjusting to the German school she was attending. Chase was allowed to attend the American school simply because it was his senior year. Donica, however, was put in the German school system because she was younger, and because it was already costing \$500 a month to send Chase to the DOD school. But trying to learn German by total immersion and trying to make new friends with the German students was more of an emotional struggle for Donica than she could handle. Normally a bubbly optimist, she was becoming withdrawn and silent.

Susan found herself in a constant battle with loneliness and depression. Uprooted from her friends and relatives in the States, she longed to lean on Jordan for the emotional support that could perhaps help make a difference in her situation. But because of his responsibilities, he was less able now than at any time in their twenty years of marriage to give her the attention she needed.

Jordan's language classes at the Goethe Institute lasted three hours a day. Then there was homework, ongoing arrangements with the mission board, telephone conversations with other team members, planning sessions, and a host of other activities that seemed to constantly pull him away.

The four other families who were on the German-language mission team with the Raus had planned to join them in Munich for language training. But due to the severity of the housing shortage, the mission board chose at the last moment to settle the other families in Nürnberg, an hour and a half to the north. Thus, Susan was deprived of even the minimal companionship that could have been provided by another missionary wife.

The weather in Munich had been miserable. The Alps were normally in view to the south of the city, but the Raus had scarcely been able to see and enjoy them. The dense fog and clouds just wouldn't seem to go away.

Susan was sure that if the attractive salary weren't such a lure for him, Jordan—despite his never-say-die optimism—would have already packed it in.

“God,” she moaned into her pillow, “is this really Your will?” She grabbed the bedspread in her fingers and squeezed. “I don't think I can...”

It was no use. Prayer didn't seem effective anymore. She should have been comforted by pouring out her soul to God, but everything seemed so confusing right now.

Jordan seemed to regard her faith as something primitive. She remembered quoting a verse to him from I Peter, about casting all your cares on God. “Honey,” Jordan replied, “Peter was a fisherman, an uneducated man with limited resources. He was only speaking out of a desperate sense of his own need. But we can't expect God to be our beast of burden. Day-to-day pressures and pains are *our* responsibility, not God's. They're common to everyone. Have you ever known a Christian who didn't face any struggles? No, of course not. And that proves my point.”



Rolling onto her side, she stared up at the ceiling. Maybe Jordan was right. He seemed so self-assured, so determined. So utterly confident that being in Germany was right for them.

Maybe she was the problem. Maybe she just needed to grit her teeth and keep going, like Jordan. It seemed to work for him, all right. But would it work for her?

She heard the bedroom door opening, followed by the sound of Jordan's bustling movements to get ready for bed. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, feigning sleep. She didn't want to talk anymore tonight. She wouldn't know what to say, anyway.

2

Anybody want a piece of gum?" Jordan asked as they left the Munich city limits, driving south on E-II toward Bad Aibling.

"Sure...I'll take a piece," Donica said from the back seat.

"I'll take one," Chase added.

"Me, too," Susan said with a smile, reaching for the pack of gum to pass it around.

Jordan realized that the anticipation of the evening out had put them all in a good mood. It wasn't difficult to understand why. Their dinner engagement at the home of Ralph and Lynn Moseley—Heather Anne's parents—would be the first time since coming to Germany that they had been in anyone else's home. The contact with another American family in a casual atmosphere would be therapeutic for each of them. Besides, it was just good to get away from the fifth-floor apartment for a while. *God knows we need it*, Jordan thought.

During the remainder of the drive they played a car game, teased Chase about being in love, and talked about the highest peak overlooking Bad Aibling—Wendelstein mountain, supposedly picturesque but currently hidden from them in gray clouds growing darker with the evening.

They exited the autobahn, approaching Bad Aibling, a small township nearly forty miles southeast of Munich. Susan, with her



hand-drawn map, helped Jordan navigate the last five miles of intersections, traffic lights, turns, and residential streets.

They made only one wrong turn. It cost them a few minutes and some consternation before Jordan realized their mistake and retraced his way back to the correct street, but they still arrived at the Moseley home on time.

Stopping the car at the end of the gravel driveway, they were greeted by the sudden illumination of a floodlight mounted on the side of the house. Before they could all get out of the car, the front door of the house opened and out stepped a pleasant looking man with a genuine smile.

“Welcome! Welcome! I’m Ralph Moseley,” he said, extending his hand first to Jordan, then to Susan and the kids. “We’ve been looking forward to your visit.” Jordan felt himself warming to Ralph Moseley’s genial nature.

As they stepped inside and went through more introductions, Jordan knew the evening would be a good one. The whole setting was inviting and refreshing—exactly what he and his family needed. He even thought he saw Susan’s shoulders relaxing, and the sight made him more hopeful than he’d been in some time.

The two families shared a delicious steak dinner, then moved into the living room. The conversation moved easily among a variety of topics: the work which had brought each family to Munich, the ceaseless Bavarian rain, culture shock, the abundant possibilities for downhill skiing in the area, the high cost of phone calls in Germany, and German engineering—“the best in the world, along with their chocolates.”

They also talked about church. Jordan listened with interest as Ralph told about his family’s conservative Christian background. It

was a detailed and rich history.

“When my company, Raytheon, transferred me here a little over a year ago,” Ralph added, “we spent several months looking for a good English-speaking church. We visited the military chapel here at Bad Aibling, along with the ones at Bad Tölz and Munich, but they were a little too political for us. The only other alternative was St. Jude’s International Church in downtown Munich. It’s a little more liturgical than we prefer—”

“—and farther away than we prefer,” Lynn Moseley added.

“That’s true,” Ralph acknowledged. “But, as a family, we feel that we need a solid church home while we’re here. So we finally chose tradition over politics, even at the expense of convenience.” Pausing just for a second, Ralph added, “So what about you, Jordan? Where do you all attend?”

“We’ve never heard of St. Jude’s before,” Jordan told the Moseleys. “But we do know about the military chapel in Munich.” He, Susan, and the kids had attended there a few times. But they hadn’t continued, because not a single person there had reached out to welcome or befriend them. “We thought the congregation at the chapel was a little...well, a little cold, if you want to know the truth,” he finished.

“Yeah,” piped Donica from the next room, “and majorly boring.”

Amid the laughter, Lynn said, “I’m not sure that you’d find St. Jude’s to be any less dull, but I do think you’d find it to be a little friendlier.” She paused, then added, “Why don’t you go with us on Sunday if you don’t already have something else planned? We’d love for you to be our guests.”

Jordan looked at Susan to get her opinion.



“What do you think, kids?” Susan questioned Donica and Chase across the room, allowing their preference in this situation to determine her own.

“Yeah, let’s do it,” said Donica.

“Sounds great to me,” replied Chase.

Heather Anne, sitting next to Chase, smiled with excitement.

“Well,” responded Jordan, turning to look at Ralph and Lynn, “it looks like a unanimous decision. I guess all we need to know now is how to get there.”

“Actually, it would be easier to show you than tell you,” Ralph said. “Why don’t you just meet us at the American high school, say about ten-thirty Sunday morning? You can follow us to the church from there.”

“Sounds good,” agreed Jordan. “It’s a date.”

On the following Thursday morning, near lunchtime, Ricardo Alvarez drove into the parking lot of the Burger King located in the off-base American housing area of the McGraw *Konserne* in Munich.

The Burger King was next door to the American Department of Defense high school. It was the only American fast-food restaurant in the area where food was sold at American prices for American dollars. The restaurant was open to the public, but it was primarily for the families of American military personnel—including the Tenth Special Forces Group to the south in Bad Tölz, where Ricardo and his mother were now living with her new husband.

Being in Germany had done nothing to change Ricardo’s opinion of the move forced upon him. He hated the German

weather, hated the German people, hated the German language—hated everything about this gloomy, rain-drenched country.

Skippping school this morning, he had come to the Burger King to eat a late breakfast. He had already missed more than half of the school days since his arrival at the DOD high school. It was a foregone fact that he would fail the school year. But he had no intention of repeating the tenth grade—not next year, not ever. In fact, he had recently decided to phase out of school all together.

Mitchum had been away on field exercises for most of the eight weeks they had been in Germany, which suited Ricardo just fine. The less he saw of the man, the better.

His mother was spending most of her time at the bar just inside the Flint *Konserne*. Nothing different in her life. The street signs around her were now in a different language, but drunk was still drunk.

Fighting boredom, Ricardo spent the majority of his days lying around in his room listening to his heavy metal tapes and watching videos.

Occasionally, as he had today, he would sneak away in Mitchum's BMW while the soldier was out of town and his mother was over at the bar.

It was illegal in Germany for anyone under eighteen to drive on the open road—even for someone like Ricardo, who had an American driver's license. He had found that out from Mitchum, who read it to him from some military orientation papers. He had also been informed that a violation of that particular law by an American soldier's son or daughter could jeopardize that soldier's tour, rank, and career.

Eyeing an empty parking space, Ricardo reminded himself



that he couldn't care less about his stepfather's career or reputation. Nevertheless, he wasn't eager to get caught violating the driving rule. For one thing, the German police were no more appealing to him than anything else in this country. For another thing, Mitchum would beat the daylight out of him—or try to. As much as he despised the Green Beret, Ricardo wasn't sure he wanted to try to take him on man-to-man.

Parking the 1979 silverish-gray BMW, he got out and slammed the door.

Before ordering his food, he strolled through the dining area and into the men's rest room, about halfway back along the inside wall.

After using the facilities and washing his hands, he turned to the exit door and gave it a hard shove. To his shock, the door stopped in midswing and came careening back at him. He barely managed to get his hands up in front of his face before the door hit him.

Knocked off balance, he stumbled back against a urinal. "You jerk!" he yelled, adding a profanity at the unknown person on the other side of the door. He started to shove the door back. But before he could regain his balance, three tall, lean, brown-skinned guys shoved their way into the room. The first one grabbed Ricardo by the collar and slammed him against the far wall of the rest room.

"What you call me, mon?" he demanded, his voice a dangerous whisper.

Ricardo found himself staring up into the scariest pair of eyes he had ever seen—dark eyes with a flat, empty stare like that of a shark. The man's oval, caramel-colored face was surrounded with

shoulder-length reddish-brown dreadlocks. From their looks and their accent, Ricardo knew that the guys were Jamaican. The neighborhood adjacent to his high-rise in Chicago had been filled with them.

Too late, he realized he had taken too much time to answer the question. One of the other Jamaicans, signaled by a nod from the first, made a quick move and was suddenly holding a switchblade to Ricardo's throat.

"Ottey ask you a question, mon," said the knife-wielder, a wicked expression hardening on his face.

Ricardo felt the point of the blade dimpling the skin of his neck. His whole body tensed with fright.

"Uh...I...uh..." he stuttered, his tongue tangled with a rush of fear. He felt a sting as the blade moved slowly across his neck, drawing blood. A dribble of the warm liquid ran down over his adam's apple.

"Okay, man, I'm sorry!" he panted. "I didn't mean it!" His voice strained with terror.

His tone apparently wasn't apologetic enough. Two of the Jamaicans grabbed him by the shoulders of his jacket and threw him headfirst into one of the toilet stalls.

Sprawled across an open toilet seat, Ricardo felt every muscle in his body stiffen. Fearing for his life, everything inside him shouted to fight back.

But before he could react, the Jamaican with the knife was on top of him again, once more with the knife to his throat.

Ricardo, motionless and breathing hard, knew he was trapped. His heart was hammering at his breastbone like a wild animal.

"You say you didn't mean it," said the Jamaican holding the



knife. His voice was even and controlled. “Den how sorry are you, mon?”

“How sorry do you want me to be?” Ricardo asked, his voice breaking.

“You sorry enough to buy us our lunch?” asked Ottey from outside the stall.

Ricardo didn’t know if the Jamaican was serious or not. He wasn’t sure how to answer, and he was afraid of the consequences of saying the wrong thing.

“Well mon, what is your answer?” demanded Ottey.

“Sure, man. I can do that,” he said in a tight whisper, thanking his good fortune that he’d lifted a twenty from his mother’s purse before she left this morning.

The Jamaicans stepped back at the signal from the leader. Ricardo edged to the back of the stall, his widened eyes glued on the Jamaicans. He bent forward and pulled some toilet paper from the roll. He wiped away the blood from his neck. Then he tore off a small piece of tissue, doubled it over, got up, and cautiously walked over to the sink and mirror.

Trying as inconspicuously as possible to watch from the corner of his eye to see if the Jamaicans were going to make another sudden move, he looked in the mirror at the cut on his throat. It was much smaller than he expected. He placed the folded tissue on the cut and held it there until it absorbed enough of the oozing blood to be held in place by itself.

Ricardo straightened his clothes.

“What is your name?” the lead Jamaican asked.

“Ricardo...Ricardo Alvarez,” he answered. He realized that his voice still trembled with fright.

"Believe yourself to be lucky today, mon," one of the other Jamaicans said to him. "Ottey has had people killed for less den what you call him."

Ricardo, his heart still pounding inside him, could feel the guy's seriousness. It was as cold and hard as the knife blade that had cut his throat.

"Like I said, man, I didn't mean it." Ricardo's voice tapered off to a whisper. He had been humiliated. But what could he do? Whoever these guys were, they were bad, mean, and fearless. All business. No play.

Ottey looked at Ricardo, once again penetrating him with a hard stare. "I'm still hungry, mon," he said, motioning with his head toward the rest room door.

"Okay," Ricardo said in a defeated voice. "It's on me."

At the table, which was spread with burgers, fries, and shakes, Ricardo sat in nervous silence as the Jamaicans ate, conversing among themselves. Intimidated by the three men and their unflinching hostility, Ricardo caught himself thinking, *I bet nobody ever forced these guys to do anything they didn't want to. Like make an international move. I bet they don't take crap from anybody.*

He wondered what it would be like to be part of a group like this—defiant, breeding terror, taking what you wanted, when you wanted...

His daydreaming was interrupted by the entry of a girl. He had seen her twice before in the halls of the American school. She was a senior. He didn't know her by name, and he had never talked to her. But she was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen.



Long, thick, dark hair. Brown eyes. Sculpted features. Radiant smile.

His eyes followed her intently as she ordered her food and sat down with two other girls to eat lunch. Then he realized with a start that Ottey was speaking to him.

“You want her, don’t you, mon?”

“Huh? What?” Ricardo answered, now embarrassed.

“Ottey ask do you want her?” interjected Martin, the third Jamaican.

At first Ricardo remained silent. He didn’t know what to say. Why were they asking him such a question? Were they serious? Were they making fun of him? Sure, he’d like to have the girl. What red-blooded, living, breathing male wouldn’t?

Before Ricardo could answer he heard Ottey say, “Martin, you and Tito follow her after school. Find out how she get home, who she go wid, where she live. Tomorrow we will take her. First us and den our little friend Ricardo.” Ottey turned his menacing eyes on Ricardo. “She go to school wid you, mon?”

They were serious.

Ricardo nodded, hesitantly.

“Den you will show us when she leave de school.”

Ricardo froze, his mind jarred by a dozen unspoken questions. Finally he nodded again.

It was then, for the first time, that he saw the three Jamaicans smile.