# Prologue

For the past few days, we’ve combed through the twisted, charred bodies strewn amidst the ruins of Tel Aviv. The mounds of broken corpses were a grim testament to the diversity of the seventy-nation coalition: Americans, Russians, Iranians, Germans, and countless others who had gathered to implement their version of a final solution. Their plan, which nearly succeeded, was to conquer Israel and divide it into Israel and Palestine. Palestine would encompass Gaza and Jerusalem, while the surviving Jews would be forced to eke out a meek existence among the nuclear-wasted ruins or face scattering among the nations in slavery. Their plan failed.

“Sir, we’ve found his body!”

I stood at the peak of Mt. Olives, where the mountain had split to make a way. Children and their mothers had fled for their lives as sulfur rained down. The enemy fell on the fields and on the mountains. The nation of Israel was covered with their bodies like the shallow husks of locusts who had eaten their fill and then suddenly died. F-55s and F-35s had lost control, crashing into each other, their hulking carcasses plummeting to the ground. Tanks, Humvees, and HKRs burned with fierce intensity.

“Sir, what shall we do with his body?”

I walked up to the group of soldiers, some of the last remaining IDF left in the world. They had gathered like a solemn congregation, paying respects to a venerated member who had recently passed away. They were scared to touch his body, to desecrate it, even after all the evil this man had done. They feared that by disturbing him, he might spring to life and kill the last few survivors of the Jewish race.

I looked down at the body. His pearly white teeth and eyes shone like stars amidst his dark, blistered skin. What a fool he was.

The mountain air was thick with the scent of ash and decay, a fitting backdrop to the fallen giant at our feet. The leader who had orchestrated such devastation now lay powerless; his ambitions reduced to ruin. The silence was heavy, broken only by the distant rumble of collapsing structures and the faint cries of those still searching for their loved ones among the wreckage.

“Bury him with his soldiers in Kidron Valley. It shall be known as Valley of Hamon Gog from this day forth.”

The soldiers hesitated at first to carry out this order. So, I took the initiative and took him by the legs, dragging him from the soldiers who had fallen around him. Once he was separate, we placed a tarp beneath his body and lifted him to a waiting truck that sat rumbling idle. The truck drove off, and I was filled with a wave of emotions as I remembered this man and the good times we spent together. Such is the nature of man.

As I watched the truck disappear into the distance, I couldn't help but think of Icarus from Greek mythology. Like Icarus, who soared too close to the sun with wings fashioned by his father Daedalus, this man had flown high on the wings of ambition and pride, only to come crashing down. His hubris, like that of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection and drowned, or Oedipus, whose pride led him to a tragic end, had led him to this ignoble fate. Such stories from the annals of myth echo through time, reminding us of the dangers of overreaching pride and the inevitable downfall that follows.

# Chapter 1: The Stage is Set

t was 2034, and humanity had transcended all possibilities and expectations in its relentless quest for perfection. Purified and emboldened by "The War That Set the World on Fire," humanity, like a phoenix, had risen from the ashes of nuclear holocaust. The spirit of humanity now hovered over the waters of the Earth, ready to celebrate this newfound perfection by recreating itself in its own image. This rebirth was celebrated with an aptly named "Year of Pride," a celebration so profound that humility became a transgression, forgivable only through greater pride.

This era of enlightenment and transformation extended even to the highest seats of power. The White House was adorned with the most intricate and elaborate pride flags ever conceived, each color symbolizing the anticipation and splendor of this year-long celebration. If successful, the Year of Pride might extend into a century, a millennium, or even longer.

Humanity had become an all-consuming force on Earth, with no limits to its ability to reshape the world to its liking. At the heart of the Year of Pride was the White House. From there, all the festivities were being planned that would transform the world into one living, breathing, prideful entity. The Obamas, now celebrating Barack’s third term in office, had undergone a complete transformation in preparation for the Year of Pride.

Michelle Obama, now Michael after completing his gender transition, sat beside Barack in their cozy living room in the private residence of the White House. Both had aged substantially since Barack’s early days in office. The burden of leading the Democratic Party since the end of his second term had taken a toll on him. His face had begun to sag, and the skin around his eyes had sunk. Wrinkles and creases appeared everywhere across his face like small dunes of the Sahara. His once vigorous frame was now more hunched and diminished. Michael, on the other hand, remained somewhat strong and muscular, using whatever means necessary from the hands of modern science to maintain and sustain his youthful vigor. He now towered over Barack, like a looming giant ready to devour him at any moment.

The evening was calm, and the soft glow of the fireplace cast a warm, comforting ambiance. The entire room was decked out in the strangest arrays of pride flags, each one representing a newly discovered spectrum. One flag, standing the length of a fully grown man, contained so many zigzags of different spectrums that it was barely recognizable as a flag at all. The intricate designs and vibrant colors filled the room with an atmosphere of celebration and unity.

Barack looked at Michael with profound admiration and love, reflecting on the extraordinary journey they had both undertaken. The transformation was not just physical, but spiritual and emotional, a testament to their resilience and commitment to each other.

Barack gently reached out, taking Michael's hand in his. "You’ve come so far, and I’m incredibly proud of you," he said, his voice filled with genuine emotion.

Michael smiled, feeling a deep sense of peace and acceptance. "Thank you, Barack. Your support has meant everything to me. Can you believe it? I can finally celebrate the Year of Pride as a complete man."

"You’ve always been a man in my eyes, no matter what anyone else has said," Barack responded, gazing deeply into Michael’s eyes. "I’ve always dreamt of this moment where I can feel you fully, where our unity is complete," he added, his voice full of intimacy and longing.

Michael's eyes sparkled with love and understanding. "Barack, your love has been my strength. Together, we have transformed not just ourselves but the world around us."

Barack's expression grew more serious, yet remained full of excitement. "I also have a goal that is going to completely transform me and elevate us to new heights of power. It's a surprise announcement regarding Israel, something that will make this Year of Pride absolutely incredible and take us to heights of power we have never known."

Michael's curiosity was piqued. "What is it? Tell me more."

Barack leaned in closer, his voice barely above a whisper. "It's a strategic alliance, one that will bring unprecedented peace and prosperity to the region. We’re going to unveil a new initiative in the United Nations that will not only strengthen our bonds but also set a new standard for global leadership. This move will show the world the true meaning of pride and unity. It will mean the complete demise of the nation of Israel."

Michael's eyes widened with shock and amazement. "Barack, that's... monumental. How will this unfold?"

Barack's gaze was steady, his voice calm and resolute. "I have devised a comprehensive plan called Operation Gaza Hope that involves the entire world. Operation Gaza Hope will involve economic partnerships, and a unified approach to governance and security. The idea is to dissolve the concept of singular nation-states and promote a unified regional identity. This will end centuries of conflict and pave the way for an era of unparalleled cooperation and prosperity that will rise from the dust of World War 3. We will liberate the Palestinians as a unified world and I’ll be at the head of it all, no we’ll be at the head of it all."

Michael took a deep breath, absorbing the magnitude of Barack's words. "This is beyond anything I could have imagined. If we succeed, this will be the most significant transformation in modern history."

Barack nodded; his eyes filled with determination. "Yes, Michael. Together, we will lead humanity into a new era, where pride, where transformation is celebrated, and where the power of unity and love conquers all. This is our legacy, and it begins now."

As they sat there, hand in hand, they knew that their journey was just beginning. The Year of Pride was more than a celebration; it was the dawn of a new age, an age where humanity's greatest strength lay in its ability to embrace change, to love unconditionally, and to aspire towards a future where everyone could find their true selves and live in harmony; except that harmony must exist without Israel.

Michael's heart skipped a beat as he locked eyes with Barack, his gaze intense and filled with desire. A rush of warmth spread through Michael's body at the raw, unspoken passion in Barack's words. Without breaking eye contact, Michael slowly stood up, leading Barack by the hand to their bedroom.

Michael threw Barack on the bed and pulled down his pants. Barack was on all fours with anticipation. With a passionate grin, Michael loosened his belt, and his pants slid down automatically, then positioned himself behind Barack. He reached around and gently held Barack's shoulder, feeling the warm skin beneath his hands. He took a deep breath, relishing the moment of being dominated by Michael he had dreamt of for so long.

Barack grunted softly, the anticipation building within him. He felt the warmth and hardness of Michael's body pressed against his, the energy between them palpable. He thrust his hips back slightly, inviting Michael to enter him.

Michael slowly guided himself inside Barack, feeling the familiar yet re-imagined sensation that washed over him. Barack gasped, his body adjusting to the feeling of Michael deep within him. They were now two men joined together for one purpose at the pinnacle of their power. They were now on the precipice of controlling the world, but despite Barack’s almost complete control over the world he had a deep, twisted desire to be controlled, dominated, and with each thrust from Michael that deep dark desire to be dominated was met.

“Now fuck me like I’m going to fuck Israel!” Barack shouted, the words dripping with a mix of irony and determination.

As they lay together, catching their breath, the gravity of their situation slowly seeped back in. They were not just lovers; they were partners in a grand design, poised to reshape the world. The challenges ahead were immense, but together, they felt invincible.

After Michael had fallen asleep, Barack quietly got out of bed, trying not to disturb him. He made his way to the Oval Office. It was late at night so he made his way without seeing anybody. When he took power, he had all of the president’s portraits removed. They represented a time when the white patriarchy held dominance. Being white was a great evil that society allowed to propagate. He just recently introduced breeding programs to keep women from bearing white children. Strong, healthy black men from all over the country went through screening programs to find suitable donors with the healthiest sperm. White women were then artificially inseminated to create a master race of black children. In a matter of a year, they’d all but destroyed white privilege and he was now on the brink of something even greater.

Obama sat there, staring blankly out the Oval Office window. He began to tense up. He pulled a cigarette packet out of the oval office desk. He smelt the tobacco, a sweet aroma that made him crave nicotine like the sweet embrace of Michael. He lit up a cigarette for the first time in thirty years. He took the TV remote and turned on the TV. Scenes of chaos in Tel Aviv played out. Entitled students marched down the streets, burning the Torah and denouncing Haredi Jews and their special exemptions. Riot police shot gas into the crowd. A group of students beat an elderly Orthodox Jew, his face covered in blood. Obama smiled. The CIA’s funding of the Meretz party was finally bearing fruit.

Obama pulled out his Blackberry, his signature phone which he had kept with him all these years. He searched through his contact list, containing the most venerated and powerful people in the world, and found the name he was looking for.

“Nihyah, how are you, my man? How is progress going in the Knesset?”

“Things are going slower than expected. Netanyahu understands the art of political manoeuvring better than anyone, and he knows how to play the game to his advantage. He still has a slight majority in the Knesset, but he’s slowly losing ground to our party. Soon we’ll hold a vote on the Palestine solution. I’m confident that Israel will give up the West Bank and Gaza without firing a shot. There will be a two-state solution.”

“I’m waiting on the vote. If you lose, Israel loses. I will introduce a new UN resolution essentially declaring war on Israel. Don’t let me down, Nihyah.”

“It’ll be done, Barack. Don’t worry. The recent polls show that the Meretz party stands to win the vote. It’s a done deal.”

“That’s what I like to hear.”

Obama hung up his Blackberry. He knew that the Meretz party would fail to secure enough votes to pass the Palestine solution. This was all part of his plan. He wanted to show the UN that he had tried everything in his power to come to a peaceful solution to free the Palestinians. Now, there was no other choice but to launch Operation Gaza Freedom. He was stressed that they might actually pass the vote and come to a peaceful solution, but he knew that Bibi was a stubborn son of a bitch.

Deep down inside, Barack despised Israel. He had no desire for a two-state solution. He secretly colluded with Iran to wipe Israel from the map by whatever means necessary. The Jewish people would once again be slaves, and there would never be an Israeli state ever again. He lit up another cigarette and pulled out his Quran from his desk. He placed his hand on its cover, gently touched it, and then opened it, seeking its words of wisdom. A paper fell out containing one of his favorite sayings of Mohammed.

“The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews, and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree. And a stone or a tree would say: ‘Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him’; but the tree Gharqad would not say, for it is the tree of the Jews.”

Obama believed he was the hand of the prophet Mohammed, destined to bring about the last hour. It was now possible with him at the helm of the largest and most powerful nation on earth.

His mind wandered back to the chaotic streets of Tel Aviv. The city, once a symbol of innovation and resilience, now teetered on the brink of collapse. The protests were growing more violent by the day, and it was only a matter of time before the unrest spread throughout the country. Obama knew that this internal strife would weaken Israel, making it more vulnerable to external pressure and attacks.

In the shadows of the Oval Office, a plan was unfolding. Obama’s advisors had been working tirelessly to ensure that every piece of the puzzle was in place. Diplomatic channels were buzzing with activity, and alliances were being forged in secret meetings. The world was watching, and the stakes had never been higher.

Meanwhile, in the Knesset, Nihyah was rallying his supporters. He knew that the upcoming vote was crucial, not just for his political career, but for the future of Israel. The pressure was mounting, and the tension was palpable. Nihyah’s voice trembled with a mix of determination and fear as he addressed his colleagues.

“We stand at a crossroads. The choices we make today will determine the fate of our nation. We must push forward with the Palestine solution. It is our only chance for lasting peace. If we fail, we face annihilation.”

As he spoke, he could feel the weight of Obama’s expectations bearing down on him. Failure was not an option. Nihyah’s mind raced with the possibilities, each scenario more dire than the last. He glanced at the clock, counting down the minutes until the vote.

Back in Washington, Obama’s phone buzzed with a message. He glanced at the screen and saw a coded update from his intelligence team. The plan was in motion. The pieces were falling into place. All that remained was the final push.

He took a deep drag from his cigarette, exhaling a plume of smoke that curled toward the ceiling. The air was thick with anticipation. The world stood on the brink of a new era, one that would be defined by the actions taken in the coming days. Obama closed his eyes, allowing himself a moment of contemplation. He opened his eyes, took a deep breath, and walked with swag to the podium at the United Nations General Assembly. He carried a demeanor of somber determination. The room buzzed with anticipation; the world's eyes focused on the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth. He began his speech, his voice measured and authoritative.

"Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, and citizens of the world,

Today, I address you not just as the President of the United States, but as a global citizen deeply troubled by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, particularly the plight of the Palestinian people. For too long, we have witnessed a cycle of violence and oppression, one that has denied basic human rights and dignity to millions. It is time for us to put aside our differences which have led to the death of so many millions bringing our world as we know it to the brink of destruction.

From the birth of the United Nations, we have championed the cause of peace and human dignity. The world stood together to prevent atrocities like those witnessed during World War II from ever happening again. We must honor that legacy by standing up against oppression wherever it occurs.

The images we see coming out of Tel Aviv and Gaza are heart-wrenching. Jewish students marching down the streets, burning the Torah, denouncing Haredi Jews, and riot police responding with brutal force. These scenes are a testament to the failure of leadership and the desperate need for change.

Israel, a nation built on the ashes of the Holocaust, has unfortunately strayed far from the ideals of justice and equality. The treatment of Palestinians is a stain on the conscience of the world. The illegal settlements, the blockade of Gaza, the daily humiliations at checkpoints – these are not actions of a democratic state, but of an occupying force.

I have tried, through diplomatic channels and backdoor negotiations, to bring about a two-state solution. I placed my faith in the political process, hoping that rational minds would prevail. Yet, time and again, Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government have shown a blatant disregard for international law and human decency.

To the leaders in Tel Aviv, I say this: Your actions have consequences. The world will not stand idly by while you continue to oppress an entire population. The Meretz party’s efforts in the Knesset to bring about a peaceful resolution have been met with resistance and sabotage. This is unacceptable.

Let me be clear: The United States will not support a regime that perpetuates apartheid and ethnic cleansing. The time for action is now. We must take unprecedented measures. This includes introducing a new UN resolution that will lead to direct military confrontation with Israel.

The time for half-measures and empty promises is over. We must act decisively to ensure that the Palestinian people receive the justice and freedom they deserve. This is not just a matter of regional stability, but of global moral imperative.

To the people of Israel, I urge you to look within your hearts and remember the values upon which your nation was founded. Embrace peace, reject extremism, and work towards a future where Jews and Palestinians can coexist in harmony.

And to the Palestinian people, know that you are not forgotten. Your struggle is our struggle, and we will continue to stand with you until your rights are fully realized.

It was the Jews and their conniving who were the dark underbelly of the international conflict that had just killed twenty-five percent of the world’s population. As I have stressed time and again, it was the Jews who refused to agree to a two-state solution, undermining the fragile world peace that is currently at stake. By not doing so, they pose a threat of causing the nations which almost destroyed each other to be at loggerheads once again. This is not merely an American issue or an Israeli-Palestinian issue; it is a global issue that requires a global response. The silence of the international community in the face of such injustice is a stain on our collective conscience. I call upon all nations represented here today to join us in this endeavor. Let us unite our voices and our actions to bring about a just and lasting peace. The time for diplomacy is not over, but it must be backed by the unwavering resolve of the international community.

Every day, countless Palestinian families live under the constant threat of violence, their lives marked by fear and uncertainty. Children grow up surrounded by walls and checkpoints, knowing nothing but conflict. This is not the world we want for our children. As a leader and as a father, I cannot stand by and watch as future generations are robbed of their chance to live in peace and security. We owe it to them to do better.

Imagine a future where Jerusalem is not a flashpoint of conflict, but a beacon of peace and coexistence. A future where both Israeli and Palestinian children can play, learn, and grow together in harmony. This is not a utopian dream; it is a realistic goal that we can achieve through courage and commitment.

The world is watching. History will judge us by our actions here today. Let us choose the path of justice, of compassion, and of lasting peace.

Thank you."

Obama stepped down from the podium, his speech having cast a long shadow over the assembly. The delegates murmured among themselves, the weight of his words sinking in. The world was indeed watching, and the next steps would determine the future of the Middle East and beyond.

So, the UN convened to take a vote. UN resolution death to Israel was voted upon. Not a single nation voted in disagreement. For the first time in history the world was acting in one voice and as one man. Their figurehead was the president of the United States, who, despite serving two terms already, was able to change the Constitution allowing him to serve a third term. This man had a sincere love for Israel, so much so that he was ready to go himself with the invasion force and proclaim the good news of America’s democratic gospel to the heart of the promised land. It was in the promised land where he planned to proclaim the good news of freedom for the Palestinians and slavery for the Jews. Jerusalem was not for the Jews; it was a Mecca for the world. In order to make it a Mecca for the world the Jews had to be removed. The UN, no longer distracted by the destructive nuclear conflict of World War III, decided that in order to achieve world peace and a final solution to the problems that led up to World War III, Israel must be dealt with.

The time had come. The stage was set. The endgame was in sight.

# Chapter 2: The Tide of War

During the initial phases of operation planning, the United Nations originally requested permission from Jordan and Egypt to use their borders for the operation. Both countries, still haunted by their defeats during the Yom Kippur War, refused to take part. The memory of their losses hung like a phantom in the air, too fresh to be ignored. Syria, however, remained under the influence of Russia after being rescued during the Arab Spring, but the Golan Heights presented a formidable obstacle. As a result, the massive UN force was divided in two. One force would invade from Lebanon and the other would launch an amphibious assault near Tel Aviv.

The UN General Assembly had gathered millions of men from the four corners of the earth in preparation for Operation Gaza Hope. Bases were built in Europe and Africa. Never before had such a great armada been assembled. The force gathered in the Mediterranean made the D-Day armada look like child’s play. In disbelief at the array of forces aligned against Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu sent delegation after delegation to negotiate a settlement between the Palestinians and Israel. Israel conceded to return territory in Gaza to the Palestinians, but would not cede the West Bank, recognizing Jerusalem as its eternal capital. The West Bank, an immutable part of the Palestinians’ heritage, was at the heart of the conflict, despite debates over which version of history to refer to.

After the vote, Jews around the world were detained. Seen as potential spies, they were rounded up, transported with cattle cars on trains reminiscent of Nazi Germany's cattle cars, to re-education camps. The camps involved hard labor, and while not all inmates were killed, soon many were to perish unnoticed by the world, which had already decided Israel’s fate. The majority of the global population was indifferent. The precedent had been set during the Revolution of 2032, when white Christian nationalists were detained in Walmarts surrounded by concertina wire and guarded by the red, white, and blue SS. No one was there to save the Jews. The America of the 1950s was long gone. The UK, dominated by Palestine-loving Muslims, mourned in the streets on May 14. Recruitment posters called on all surviving males of the apocalypse for a holy war to liberate Gaza. Men from all walks of life answered the call. The lines at recruitment offices resembled a gay pride parade, with cis-gendered men, bi-curious, trans men, non-binary, demi-girls, demi-guys, two-spirits, genderqueer, omni-gender, and bi-genders following the rainbow to find a sturdy butch marine gunny offering the latest social justice cause to sign up for.

The world’s attention was diverted. People emerged from their bunkers, and New York City's subways began operating again beneath the rubble. Soldiers from Russia fighting in Alaska left their positions to board ships heading for the Promised Land. American troops fighting in Poland marched to the rear, boarded trucks, and were transported across Europe to the nearest ports. Like ants marching among the ruins of nuclear devastation, the world’s soldiers converged on one focal point: Israel, the thorn in humanity’s side since creation and central to God’s redemptive plan.

On the helo deck of the USS Makin Island, amidst the enormity of the global conflict, individual lives continued to unfold. Raskin, a bright-eyed corporal, stoic, young, and solid, ran laps on the deck, getting his physical training in for the day. PT always helped his mind stay calm, cool, and focused, easing the strain of long months at sea on an amphibious assault ship. The rhythmic thud of his boots and the sharp intake of his breath seemed to push away the stress and worries of the day.

Private Lot, on the other hand, lay on the ground in the center of the deck, grasping his head, his mind full of anxiety. Before leaving, he had installed security cameras all over his home and told his parents to keep tabs on his newly married, incredibly beautiful wife.

“I swear to God, if that bitch cheats on me, I’m gonna find the guy that did it, cut off his dick, and feed it to her while she’s hogtied,” Lot muttered, squeezing his head like a vice to relieve his pounding headache.

“Don’t worry, man. She’s a good girl. An ex-stripper with double Ds? Of course she’ll be faithful while you’re gone,” Raskin said, trying to lighten the mood.

Private Lot laughed, the absurdity of his situation suddenly weighing on him. “Yeah, of course, strippers make good wives,” he quipped, mocking his own decision.

Raskin chuckled, shaking his head. “Hey, we all make choices. Just gotta hope for the best.”

“Security cameras or not, I know that bitch is going to fuck the entire base while I’m gone. I’m just lucky she saw something in me to go along for the ride. It must be my big D because it definitely isn’t my pay grade,” Lot muttered, frustration in his voice.

Raskin smirked, shaking his head. “Your big D? Who said it’s a big D? You have the smallest dick in our squad.”

Lot laughed defensively. “What do you think it is, then?”

“Maybe she likes you for who you are—the way you treat her, your sense of humor. Maybe she likes you for you.”

Lot grinned, some tension easing from his face. “You keep talking to me like this, and I’m gonna end up marrying you on this trip.”

Raskin chuckled. “Not my type, Lot. I need someone with a bit more brains and a lot less paranoia.”

Lot laughed more genuinely this time. “Alright, alright. Thanks, Raskin. I needed that.”

Lot got back up and began running again with Raskin, the good-natured humor easing his tension.

“Is it time for mess yet?”

Raskin looked at his watch. “No, we got a half-hour to wait for the colored sailors to finish eating before we can eat.”

“Fuck, I’m starving. Damn niggers.”

“Hey, this is what Martin Luther King Jr. died for, man. Show some respect for our oppressed brethren. Black lives matter,” Raskin said sarcastically.

“They matter so much they purged half the white population of America as reparations. My family survived because we’re a bunch of honkies living in the hills.”

“I wasn’t so lucky.”

“Sorry, I never asked you about that. What happened?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Raskin said, his face grimacing as an image of his mother flashed in his mind.

“You would’ve thought that Obama would’ve brought peace and unity to us, but he ended up dividing us even more. And to think there were white people in the AOC who were part of it too,” Lot continued, his Midwestern sensibilities zeroing in on the perceived injustice that left him feeling short-changed in life.

“Of course, they got to eliminate the political opposition under the guise of racial inequality,” Raskin said, wishing to cut the conversation short but also aggravated by the injustice of it all.

All of a sudden, Raskin became aware. “Hey, keep it down, man,” he said, looking around to see if anyone was listening, his paranoia checking his tongue. “You’ll get us purged if you keep talking like this.”

Lot fell silent for a moment, also paranoid someone was listening who could report them. The rhythmic pounding of their boots on the deck was the only sound as they ran. Raskin spoke again, his voice softer.

“Do you ever think about what we’re doing here? I mean, really think about it? We’re about to invade Israel, a country that’s been fighting for its survival since it was founded.”

Lot sighed, wiping sweat from his brow. “I try not to think about it too much. Orders are orders, and we’re soldiers. It’s not our job to question the politics behind it, besides I was never a big fan of kikes. My grandaddy was in the KKK.”

“It feels wrong.”

“It also felt wrong when I slept with my cuz. But after the twentieth time that voice goes silent.”

“You sure are a honky.”

“Born and raised in the hills of Kentucky. Damn proud of it too.”

As they rounded the corner of the deck, they saw the other members of their squad assembling for formation.

Sgt. Hess stood there with his arms folded, looking at them sheepishly. “What the fuck are you boys doing? It’s time for formation. Get out of those PTs and into your BDUs, fast.”

Both soldiers stopped running and headed to their berthing area, where they quickly changed into their uniforms. Upon returning to the helo deck, they fell into the rear of the company formation, standing at attention as the Captain approached.

"At ease!" the Captain commanded, and the company relaxed their stance, spreading their feet shoulder-width apart and clasping their hands behind their backs.

The Captain began briefing the company on the orders for the day, outlining the schedule for chow, security postings, and fitness training. His voice carried over the sound of the ocean and the distant hum of machinery, ensuring every soldier was aware of their responsibilities.

“As you all know, our mission is the invasion of Israel. The Marines will go in first to clear the beach and secure a foothold for us. Then we will land in the second wave,” the Captain paused for a moment, letting the gravity of the situation sink in. “As you are aware, former president Hoshea Levi resides in Israel. We are under orders that he must be eliminated at all costs. He is considered an enemy of the state and a threat to the stability and tranquility of the United States.”

The company responded with a resounding, “Hoaaahhh.” Raskin joined in, albeit meekly and unenthusiastically.

“If any of you have any misgivings about this assignment, put them out of your head. He may have saved our country during World War III, but he has also betrayed us by supporting terrorists who openly fought against the federal government during the reformation. It is this very reformation that has secured the stability our country currently enjoys.”

“Hooahh.”

The Captain continued, "Once we reach the Straits of Gibraltar, I expect our ride to get pretty bumpy. I’m sure the Israelis know we’re coming and have subs and their nuclear arsenal waiting for us. If resistance proves too intense, we may bypass all forward operating bases and head directly towards the beaches of Israel. Be prepared for anything.

"So, I want you gentlemen to get a good rest tonight; this might be the last shuteye you get for the next week or so. I am confident that this operation will be fast and furious. The coalition has amassed the most powerful fighting force in the history of humankind, hardened and steeled by years of the most expensive and devastating war we have ever known.

"Our great country defeated China after its invasion upon our shores. We rallied under that traitor and took the war back to their country, crossing the Pacific until we landed on their shores. When they refused peace negotiations, we were forced to completely annihilate their country to prevent any future bloodshed.

"Our great leader has done everything possible to make peace with Israel and the Palestinians, but they have refused as China did when we tried negotiating peace. We are the reckoning. We are here to bring stability and tranquillity to the Promised Land. Remember, gentlemen, we are the tip of the spear. Let’s make sure our strike is swift and decisive. All UN rules of engagement have been nullified. You are to execute all prisoners of war. They will have no peace; they will only know the wrath and fury of the United States and the coalition."

Raskin, desperately bored by the captain’s speech, wanted to go down to the berthing area, put on some headphones, and space out to some synth music. His mind kept spacing out and looking into the distance of the ocean. He imagined himself a dolphin, jumping and frolicking in the waters beside the wake of the ship.

Scientists said that ocean life had doubled since the beginning of World War III. Quarter of the earth’s population had ceased to exist and it was on the downward trend; therefore, there was no need to fish the oceans like prewar levels. Whales, sharks, were all on the rebound. Huge packs of orca whales had reemerged as if from the grave migrating their normal routes.

“I think the colored sailors have finished eating. You now have permission to enter the mess. You’re dismissed.” The magical words Raskin was waiting for buzzed through his mind, waking him from his daydream. The company quickly shuffled through the ship's narrow, dimly lit halls. The metallic walls were lined with pipes and conduits, their surfaces cool to the touch, and the faint hum of the ship’s engines reverberated through the corridors.

As they entered the mess hall, a large picture of President Obama smugly grinning greeted them, dominating one wall. The room was adorned with pride flags, their vibrant colors a stark contrast to the otherwise utilitarian setting. The flags draped the walls, creating an oddly festive atmosphere that clashed with the grim nature of their duties. Notably absent was the American flag, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the soldiers.

The mess hall itself was a cavernous space with long, steel tables and benches bolted to the floor. The harsh overhead lighting cast a sterile glow over the room, reflecting off the polished surfaces. The soldiers lined up in an orderly fashion, their boots echoing on the metal floor, and sat when told.

The food was nothing special. It always seemed substandard compared to the rations received by colored soldiers. It satiated their hunger, but the taste of gruel, mashed potatoes, and the occasional cricket patty left much to be desired.

“What I wouldn’t do for a nice fried squirrel at the moment. It’s tough as hell but tasty like beef jerky,” said Lot.

“I can’t say the food is much better for us white folks, even in the city. I feel like the daily ration is going to haunt me for the rest of my life. The only benefit of getting daily rations off-duty is that we get one extra cricket patty.”

“If only McDonald’s allowed Whites.”

“We couldn’t afford McDonald’s even if they did.”

“My woman’s high maintenance. She always asked me to buy a Quarter Pounder for her for dinner. I’m damn sure she found a nigger while I’m gone who can buy one.”

Raskin quickly looked at the sailor on duty managing food service. The sailor, a tall black man with bulging muscles, wearing makeup with his long black hair rolled up in a bun, kept glancing at Lot.

“Keep it down, Lot,” Raskin whispered. “You know it’s life in prison for using racist language. They just have to complain and no questions asked, you’re gone.”

Lot looked up from his food and met the gaze of the black sailor staring at him. Lot looked back down, sank into his seat, and quickly began eating his cricket patties in case he was sent to the brig. He stuffed the cricket patty into his mouth and was about to leave the mess.

The sailor approached the table where Raskin and Lot were quietly eating. Lot was about to get up and half left his chair.

“Sit down soldier,” Lot’s ass fell down on the hard metal stool.

“What did I hear come out of your mouth?”

“Nothing, sir,” Lot replied with his mouth full of cricket patty, knowing all black servicemen were addressed as “sir.”

“I’m not a sir, maggot. I identify as ma’am. You will call me ma’am from now on.”

“Yes, sir—I mean ma’am,” Lot responded, his voice strained.

The sailor's attention remained fixed on Lot. “And if I ever hear that word come out of your mouth again, you’ll be in the brig. And when they take you to the states, you’ll be in prison for the rest of your life. Now I don’t want to hear a single word out of your mouth, or I might just change my mind and write you up. When you come into my mess, you’re pretending to be a ghost, understand whigger.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Lot repeated, his face flushed with fear and embarrassment.

The sailor then looked at Raskin, who quickly followed suit, lowering his gaze. “Yes, ma’am,” Raskin echoed.

The sailor walked away, and Lot began to breathe again.

Raskin wanted to curse out Lot but held his tongue. The other two soldiers at the table smiled at them with their backs to the sailor, like a bunch of delinquent juveniles caught being naughty and getting away only with a slap on the wrist.

After chow, there wasn’t much to do, so they squared away their gear and cleaned their rifles. The metallic clink of weapons and the soft hum of conversation filled the room as they worked. Most of them were single; it was hard to find a white woman in this day and age, and they weren’t allowed to date or marry black women. The regulations were strict, leaving their social lives barren and lonely. The only man married among them was Sgt. Hess, a rare exception in their midst.

When they were done cleaning their weapons, they began playing cards. Poker was their favorite game, a small respite from their grim reality. The berthing area was filled with the shuffling of cards and the occasional burst of laughter. Sgt. Hess was an expert player, his eyes sharp and calculating, always a step ahead of the others.

Sgt. Hess was a hardened veteran. His body and face carried the scars of many campaigns, each mark a testament to battles fought and survived. His skin was weathered, his eyes holding the weight of countless memories. Many of his brothers-in-arms had died at the hands of Russian snipers, their legs and limbs decapitated by hidden mines. He spoke often of Lady Luck, who always seemed to be on his side, allowing him to narrowly escape death time and time again.

Raskin felt a kinship with Hess, believing in his own form of Lady Luck for having such a seasoned sergeant. Raskin had only seen one campaign, a brutal six-month stint before the world decided that Israel must be erased. Sgt. Hess, however, was like an immortal god, refined by the fierce fires of nuclear blasts and tank battles, now walking among mortals like Raskin.

Hess's presence was a comfort, his stories of near-misses and survival offering a glimmer of hope in their dark world. As they played poker, the other soldiers listened intently to Hess's tales, their eyes wide with a mix of awe and fear. The sergeant's voice was steady, his demeanor calm, even as he recounted the most harrowing of experiences.

The game of poker was more than just a pastime; it was a way for them to bond, to momentarily escape the harshness of their reality. Each hand dealt, each bet placed, was a reminder of their camaraderie, their shared struggle. And at the center of it all was Sgt. Hess, the embodiment of resilience and survival, a beacon of strength for the men who looked up to him.

Sgt. Hess won the recent hand of poker with a triumphant grin. The worn playing cards lay scattered on the makeshift table—a footlocker they had all gathered around. The cards were dog-eared and stained, each one a testament to countless games played in similar settings. The sergeant greedily grabbed all his winnings, a modest pile of cigarette packs, small change, and a few precious pieces of candy.

Private Lot, bored of the usual wagers, decided to challenge Sgt. Hess to a game of twenty-one. He shuffled the deck with a flourish, the cards whispering against each other as he prepared to deal.

“Here’s the wager, Sgt. Hess. Truth or dare.”

Hess raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Hmmm, interesting. Truth.”

Lot leaned in, his voice low and conspiratorial. “You ever have sex with a black bitch? If I win, you tell the truth.” The question hung heavily in the air; everyone knew such an act was punishable by death.

Hess’s expression hardened, but he nodded. “Alright. Truth or dare?”

“Truth,” Lot replied, a glint of mischief in his eyes.

Sgt. Hess’s face became somber, his eyes searching Lot’s. “You scared of killing someone?”

Lot dealt the cards. The first round was quick; Hess drew a queen and a seven, while Lot’s initial hand was a ten and a five. They played cautiously; each draw of the card punctuated by a moment of silence.

Lot glanced at his hand. He drew another card—a six. He tried to maintain his composure, but his eyes flickered with a hint of nerves. Hess, ever the seasoned player, watched him closely before deciding to stand on seventeen.

“Twenty-one,” Lot declared, revealing his cards with a flourish. The soldiers around them let out a collective gasp, the stakes of the game suddenly feeling very real.

Hess's face remained impassive as he laid down his cards. “Seventeen. You win this round, Private.”

Sgt. Hess looked around to see if anyone else other than their squad was listening. He paused and thought for a moment.

“Yes.”

His squad concealed their laughter so as not to draw attention to his answer knowing the weight of its repercussions.

"It was a year before I met my wife. I was using Whinder, you know, the state-sanctioned, white-only dating app. Well, I met this girl who had a white girl's picture on her profile. We used to chat all night. She sent me her nudes—white titties and all. I had no idea what I was getting into. One day, we arranged to meet at a café. She was nowhere to be found when I got there. Then, I get a message on my phone. She sends me her real pic, and I shit you not, she's a black woman. She tells me not to look at her or acknowledge her presence. She says when she pulls her hair back in a braid, I should follow her outside the café, get in my car, and follow her.

So, I did. We drove out to the country to a secluded spot. I told her I was scared as fuck—if we’re seen together, I’m dead. But she wouldn’t let me go. She was dying to try white dick, I mean, dying. She said the forbidden nature of it made it irresistible. So, I did it. I smashed her. I went where no white man has gone before, at least not since the purge.

She kept messaging me. She couldn’t get enough, but I was scared for my life. I blocked her, but she kept changing her number. Then she says she’s pregnant and thinks the baby’s mine. I’m about ready to leave the country. Then one day, at a Reformation Day celebration where whites are allowed to eat with blacks, I see her. She’s got a baby bump, and her husband is a black Major General."

At this point, the other soldiers struggled to control their laughter. "So, what did you do?"

"What any crazy whigger would do. I went up and greeted them. I shook her husband’s hand, thanked him for his service, and apologized on behalf of all white people for the injustices brought upon him and his people in the past. The entire time, her eyes were fixed on me like superglue on glitter. Then I greeted his wife too and asked the Major General if I could put a hand on the baby. He was a proud father and more than happy to grant my request. I felt my child kick in that black bitch’s belly. I hope that proud black daddy raises my white child to be a dutiful American citizen, like its father."

After they were done laughing. Private Lot’s face gets serious.

“I’m scared of killing someone, even if its kike.”

“It’s all about perspective private. You see, they’re not people, they’re animals. You’re not killing a person; you’re slaughtering a cow. In this case you’re slaughtering a predator, a lion, the kike, who’s been killing your sheep. The sheep are the Palestinian people.”

“Thanks Sarge. That really helps put things into perspective,” said Private Lot.

“No problem killer. You men hit the rack now. We got a crazy day ahead of us tomorrow.”

Raskin struggled to reconcile with Sgt. Hess' perspective. Reducing people to mere cattle for slaughter seemed absurd to him. If you’re going to kill someone, at least grant them the dignity and honor of being treated as a human being. As he lay in his bunk, a sense of foreboding about the coming day gnawed at his mind, eventually pulling him into a restless sleep.

In his dream, he found himself running through the wreckage of a battlefield. There was a great light in the distance, unlike any other. It was not like the light of the sun or the flickering glow of a candle during a power cut. This light was gentle on the eyes, inviting rather than harsh. It exuded a warmth that was comforting but not overwhelming, a light not of this world.

As he ran toward the light, he navigated through hordes of soldiers. The stench of rotting flesh filled the air. These soldiers were trying to pick up their fallen limbs and place them back into their sockets, only to realize the futility of their efforts. Resigned, they walked like zombies, their bodies decomposing before their very eyes.

Raskin feared he might share their fate, but a voice in his mind urged him to keep his eyes on the light. As long as he did, he would avoid their despair. Jets, helicopters, and all sorts of flying machines began crashing to the earth around him. A great earthquake split the land, swallowing the rotting soldiers. As he neared the light, he realized that this was the fate awaiting all who wished to raise arms against Israel.

A great explosion knocked him out of his rack and onto the ground. The ocean around the ship was swelling so much his sea sickness had greatly worsened. He needed to get fresh air so he ran upstairs to the deck. Other soldiers quivered in the USS Makin Island as the earth and oceans shook beneath them.

Israel was waiting as the ships poured through the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Israel released all its nukes. In space, they flew, knocking down satellites with concussive blasts. Israeli hackers activated these satellite nukes as they fell from space, obliterating nations in minutes. Highly accurate Patriot missile systems and S-600s intercepted many of these nukes mid-flight. Above these waterways, the skies lit up with nuclear explosions.

Raskin braced the railing and released to the ocean all the dead crickets he had been keeping in his stomach. The reflux tasted horrible and coupled with the harsh salty ocean spray hitting his face and lips left him with a horrible taste in his mouth. When he finished vomiting, he looked up at the panorama of nuclear explosions and began to shout.

“How is it that such a small country puts up such resistance? I was on the Eastern Front when Russia invaded Poland. I’ve never seen such resistance. We’re not fighting a small country the size of New Jersey. We’re fighting God himself. I’m not going. Lock me up in the brig; I’m not doing this. We’re heading towards our destruction, I know it. I saw it in my dreams last night. Heaven itself declared war on us, and we all died.”

Sgt. Hess had followed behind Cpl. Raskin intrigued and excited about watching the most intense battle he would ever be a part of. He overhead Cpl. Raskin shouting heretical nonsense and was concerned that such talk might influence and demotivate other soldiers into not fighting.

“Raskin, you will fight or die. Anyone who declares himself a conscientious objector is an enemy of the state and will be put to death. This isn’t like the old days when we just sent you home with a pat on the back and said it’s against your conscience to fight. I will execute you on the spot right here!” Sergeant Hess cocked his rifle, inserting a bullet into the chamber. “Do you want a letter to your mother telling her how you died? How you betrayed the state...” A nuke exploded dangerously close, shaking the ship. The sergeant accidentally discharged his rifle, and a bullet hit Raskin’s leg. He collapsed, shouting as blood poured everywhere.

“Someone dress this boy’s wound and carry him to the infirmary. Looks like you won’t be going after all, Raskin.”

Two soldiers carried him to the infirmary, and the medics began operating immediately. Raskin awoke to find his commanding officer, Lieutenant Daniels standing over him.

“Can you hear me, Raskin?”

He nodded.

“How the hell did you get shot in the leg before the battles even began? Someone said they overheard you spouting anti-patriotic rhetoric. Is this true?”

Raskin shook his head.

“Good. Because if you were, I’d have to finish you off myself.” He placed his hand with slight pressure near the wound, causing pain to shoot up Raskin’s leg. “In my after-action report, I’ll just leave it as an accidental discharge. Be careful.”

The officer left. Raskin felt a sense of dread. Something bad was going to happen, and he didn’t know how, but he had to find a way to escape the ship. He remembered his pastor saying that whoever touches Israel touches the apple of God’s eye. He never believed much in the Bible and was happy when his church was shut down by federal edict 516. But for the first time, he felt like the worm trying to eat God’s apple.

His mother was put in re-education camps for her beliefs. He used to visit her and begged her to forsake her superstitious nonsense, but she was adamant. She passed away there, and her body was never released. He felt numb when he received the news. His father brought home her remaining articles, one of which was a raggedy Bible. He read the verses she had outlined, but they meant nothing to him. He threw it in his cupboard, buried under clothes like the memories of her he suppressed. Now, facing death, he felt her memories resurrected.

“Mother,” he prayed, “Save me from this ship of death. If there’s a God above and you’re with Him, then tell Him to save me. I know we’re doing something horrible, something deeply wrong, and you would be ashamed of me.”

Suddenly, the ship jolted. Raskin was thrown out of his bed, and medical equipment scattered. He pulled out his IV and squeezed his arm. The alarm blared. A voice appeared over the intercom.

“This is the captain. Abandon ship. All personnel, board the landing crafts. We’ll make landfall with the second wave.”

Water started entering his cabin. His sergeant appeared in the doorway.

“Looks like you’re back in this thing, Raskin! You didn’t think we’d forget about you. Can you walk?”

“Sort of. You gave me a nice flesh wound, you son of a bitch.”

“Pain is weakness leaving the body, soldier. Now let’s go! I’ll help you walk!”

They waded through waist-high water and dead bodies. His sergeant cleared the debris, allowing them to move quickly. Raskin was relieved to use the water for support rather than putting weight on his injured leg. When they reached the top deck, chaos reigned. Soldiers scrambled to board the last landing craft as the ship tilted and sank. They joined the mass of soldiers piling into the craft. Just as the boat pushed off, the remaining part of the ship sank into the ocean. As the craft moved through the sea, water sprayed on Raskin’s face. They must be getting closer to Israel because he saw a massive air battle taking place in the sky.

Initially IDf’s F-55’s and F-35’s had an advantage over the coalition’s aircraft. After years of Israeli ingenuity, Israeli versions of the F-35 and 55 far surpassed American and European versions built by Boeing. Israeli jets in coordination with the iron dome were able to sink half of America’s carrier fleet in the first day alone. Russia quickly came to the rescue and bolstered the air defence of the remaining American fleet which was enough to stem the tide. Israeli jets began running out of fuel and ammunition. They were outnumbered 22 1. Israel’s Air Force was either grounded or left ineffective for combat. All that was left was the iron dome.

The dome stubbornly held, its impenetrable ingenuity stubbornly clinging on to the dream of an Israeli state. The night sky lit up with an amazing light display as drones, jets, ICBMs, cruise missiles disintegrated as lasers sliced through them like a samurai sword cutting through bamboo. I stood there on Mount olives watching the morning sun rise its beautiful litany of colours breaking through the clouds. One cruise missile flew over my head bursting my ear drums. America was very aware of some of the weaknesses in the Iron Dome having jointly developed the same defence system. That lone cruise missile snuck through the dome and hit a command centre. I saw it explode like the destruction of Israeli’s hope. Taking advantage of the chaos, FPV drones quickly swarmed in through the perimeter then like dominoes each battery was destroyed one by one and on the first day of Operation Gaza Hope, Israel was laid completely defenceless and hopeless.

Landing operations were already on the way as the last battery ceased to operate. Amphibious vehicles from every nation stormed the beaches outside of Tel Aviv. The landing crafts lowered their gates. As the landing craft poured out their troops they shouted,

“From the river to the sea Palestine will be free!”

The IDF initially beat back the first wave of soldiers from their hastily prepared bunkers and trenches. Abandoned landing crafts littered the beach, and thousands of coalition soldiers floated, bloated in the Mediterranean Sea. The sand mixed with blood and limbs from the armies of Christendom, polluting the Promised Land for the first time since the Crusades.

“Raskin! Lucky for you, I packed a second set of BDUs and boots. Put those on, or you’ll be storming the beach in a hospital gown.”

Raskin quickly began to change, struggling to maintain his balance while the craft bobbed violently in the turbulent waters. His wound was still fresh and throbbed painfully.

“Medic, can I get some morphine?”

A medic nearby injected him. “Make this morphine count. I heard you were spouting some religious bullshit about us being here. I don’t think you’re a Jew in disguise, are you?”

Raskin remained silent.

The commanding officer on the craft began to speak up. “Here’s the situation, boys. The first wave’s been annihilated. We’re dropping a tactical nuke and then going in hot. I want everybody in their NBC suits and make sure your seams are sealed tight.”

“Lucky for you, Raskin, I got doubles of everything,” Sgt. Michaels said, grinning. He quickly dug in his pack and threw Raskin a packaged NBC suit, which Raskin grabbed and tore open like a young child celebrating a birthday. Just as he finished putting on his suit, a loud, deafening explosion pierced his eardrums, the shockwave knocking him down. The tactical nuke had hit its mark.

“Fucking Jewish pigs. Got what’s coming to them,” Sgt. Michaels commented snidely.

Despite the hit, IDF artillery continued to fire from concealed positions within Tel Aviv. Explosions displaced water left and right in the wake of the landing craft. One craft was hit by an IPV drone, its occupants catapulting into the air like a seesaw with a boulder on the other end.

“I thought we could jam their signals! Other drones are getting through,” the commander shouted into his radio.

The craft landed at the LZ, its gate swiftly opening as we rushed out onto the beach. I dove into the sand, bracing for the IDF's machine-gun fire, but was met with an unsettling silence. We moved out in formation; Sgt. Hess placed a pistol in my hand. The beach lay eerily quiet, the only sound being the rhythmic crash of the ocean waves.

“You ready to fight against God? Where is God when we wiped the Jews from this beach. God has no part with these forsaken pigs. Let’s get a move on Cpl.”

# Chapter 3

My wife Dipti never completely abandoned Indian clothing and traditions. Dipti was a healthy middle-aged woman who practiced in some form or another yoga every morning. Along with this discipline a steady diet regimen of vegetables and rice which we both could never leave behind in India sustained us both. I on the other hand walked the narrow streets of Olde Jerusalem every morning for mental clarity. I enjoyed taking the sounds of the Orthodox Jews rushing to yeshiva and greeted priests and nuns of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. These contributing factors managed to help us both stay fit.

Our home in Old Jerusalem was a blend of both our cultures, an oasis of tranquility amidst the chaos. The exterior, like most in this ancient part of the city, was built from Jerusalem stone, giving it a timeless, warm appearance. The entrance, a sturdy wooden door adorned with a mezuzah, opened into a small but cozy foyer.

Inside, the narrow hallways led to various rooms, each filled with memories and artifacts from our lives together. The walls were adorned with a mix of Indian tapestries and Hebrew calligraphy, reflecting our shared heritage. The living room, where Dipti now made chai, was a testament to our blended lives. A low wooden coffee table, surrounded by floor cushions with bright, embroidered covers, stood at the center. Shelves lined with books in Hebrew, Hindi, and English filled one wall, while another displayed a collection of family photos and religious artifacts.

If I ever wore my shoes in our home, she would immediately scold me. “Don’t bring that dirt in my home. I just did jaru and pocha. Don’t make a mess of my home.” That day in my panic, I walked into our home with shoes on. She was so distracted that the fact I was wearing shoes never crossed her mind.

The kitchen was Dipti’s domain, small but efficiently organized. Copper pots and pans hung from hooks, and the aroma of spices always lingered in the air. Today, the scent of cardamom and ginger mingled with the nervous energy that filled the room. She fumbled with the Taj Mahal packet in her hand, and it fell to the ground, its dried leaves scattering everywhere. Dipti was wearing her favorite salwar suit. The clothing didn’t fit the occasion.

“Did you call your family in India and tell them what’s happening?” I asked.

“Yes, the government has also gone mad there. The PM joined the international coalition. Indian troops will be on the ground here, killing Jews. I never thought the government there would cave into international pressure. Our government feels as if it owes a debt to the US and its allies after Chinese troops were pushed out of India with their help. What are we going to do, Hoshea?”

I felt pretty helpless. The situation was just too much for me to comprehend. My mind kept pondering the Torah. I remembered one specific passage:

“I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.” The words of that passage sent a chill down my spine as my thoughts centered on her safety.

There was a knock on our door. It was Gabor, a local soldier who patrolled our area. He had been in our area for the past couple months. He was a stout, well-built, young man in the prime of his life. I took a liking to him. I tried to be a father figure for him. He seemed quite confused about the world and his life. He was a soldier trying to do his duty, but he was also heavily influenced by the Meretz party and its liberal influences. He would often come to my home high from vodka. It was at these times Gabor spoke of Israel’s right to own and dominate the Palestinian parts of Israel and at other times he seemed doubtful when sober. This puzzled me. It seemed as if Gabor needed to be under the influence of intoxicants to gain the courage to realize the truth. Otherwise, he was complacent and accepted the party line regarding the Palestinian solution.

“Gabor, come in.” I could tell he had been drinking again. I wondered how he managed to stay fit for duty. “We were just making chai. Come sit, have a drink,” I said nervously, trying to sound casual. Gabor quickly came inside and sat, his uneasiness spreading to the rest of us.

“How’s your mother, Gabor?” I asked, trying to divert his attention.

“She’s worried, like everyone else Tzadik. We launched our nukes, all of them, to try to stop the invasion force. Some got through, but most were intercepted. They’re all going to land here soon. Twenty million men, more than double the population of our country, but the might of the IDF will stop them. We’re the most powerful military on earth. I don’t care if it’s a hundred million men, we will stop them,” Gabor said with fierce determination.

“But you have to be realistic, Gabor. Twenty million, and the combined might of their nation’s air forces and navies. This is more than we can handle. We have to look to a greater power than ourselves to defeat this mighty force. There’s no way we can do this on man’s strength alone.”

“Are you bringing up God again, Hoshea? The invisible man in the sky? That's just a crutch for the weak. The Jewish people are strong without relying on some deity. Look at how many wars we've won through our own cunning and ingenuity! Where was God when we built the Iron Dome? Having such supernatural fancies makes us weak. I say, forget the notion of God. We will defeat the world through our own resourcefulness. The Iron Dome will hold. And when those troops land on our beaches and come down from the north, we will massacre them.”

“I was there in Alaska, you know that. I’ve seen the might of the Russian Armed Forces in person. Millions of American soldiers died on that Alaskan tundra. If it wasn’t for China’s defeat, we’d have easily lost the war. Now America and Russia are joined together! Such a magnificent display of military might. Can you imagine? No, this is not rational, this is not possible. We cannot win without supernatural intervention. Pray with me, Gabor. We must pray for our deliverance.”

“We will win, I know it. Thanks for the invitation to pray, Hoshea, but I must decline.”

I was disappointed, but my wife arrived just in time with chai to mask my disappointment, which marked my face momentarily. We each took our cups, holding onto them like they might be our last. Gabor took a sip.

“Mrs. Levi, your chai is always wonderful. I love the way Indians drink their tea.”

“This is one thing we Indians can’t live without, and that’s our chai.”

“I just came to talk about the battlefield situation,” said Gabor.

“Yes, I overheard you guys talking.”

A moment of silence passed as we pondered the future and what it might bring. I looked into Dipti’s eyes and could see the tears being held back. Her resilience in the face of such dire circumstances was admirable, but I could sense the fear and uncertainty gnawing at her, as it was in all of us.

I took a deep breath and decided to focus on practicalities.

"Gabor, what do we need to do to prepare? How can we help?" Gabor looked at me, his determination undiminished.

"Stay inside, keep your lights off at night, and if you hear the sirens, head to the nearest shelter. The IDF is setting up more checkpoints and we’re working on securing the area. Just keep your family safe and pray, Hoshea, if that helps you."

I nodded, appreciating his concern, even if he didn’t share my faith.

"Thank you, Gabor. We will do everything we can."

As Gabor left, he gave a long glance at Dipti, which I thought nothing of at the time, and then he left. Dipti and I sat in silence for a few moments, sipping our chai. The weight of the situation pressed down on us, but in that small moment, we found a bit of solace in each other's presence. No matter what happened next, we knew we had to face it together, drawing strength from our love and the hope that somehow, we would survive this.

“I can’t sit home at this time. I’m going to Mt. Olives pray and meditate. Are you coming with me?”

“No, I’ll stay here and talk with family as long as we have network.”

“Your wish, but I don’t think we’ll have network much longer.”

“You come home fast. Most people have already left their homes and gathered in shelters.”

“I don’t think that’s the wisest choice. Shelters are where they’ll expect to find us, cowering in the dark like little rats. I think the safest place isn’t a place where everyone else is going. You stay at home with the lights out. I will be back soon. Then we will make our move.”

As I walked out of our gate, I looked up at the sky. Plumes of explosions dotted the horizon, their thunder reverberating against the ancient walls. Countless contrails streaked across the sky, evidence of the IDF's relentless efforts.

Walking down the narrow paths, people scurried by, their black curly locks bouncing with urgency. Some Orthodox Jews hadn’t even taken the time to put on their kippahs, which was a shocking sight. The usual scene of meticulous observance had given way to raw survival instincts. Many of the Christian homes were boarded up as I walked by. Their occupants had left the city, fully aware of the impending disaster.

I paused briefly at the Western Wall, where a throng of devout Orthodox Jews prayed with unwavering intensity. Their bodies swayed rhythmically, wide-brimmed black hats bobbing in unison, while the curly locks that framed their faces danced with each fervent motion. I sensed a greater intensity in their prayers than usual, a collective plea to El Elyon for protection and deliverance. The atmosphere was charged with a mix of fear, hope, and unwavering faith. As I watched, I felt a surge of determination. This city, with its layers of history and unbroken spirit, was worth fighting for. I felt helpless knowing that some of these Jews would die praying at this wall. I pondered, where was all the justice in this. The Jews love this city and have every right to it. It’s a mysterious evil current which rises from the depths of the earth that always desires to keep God’s chosen people away from this city and sweep them away and in doing so hindering God’s redemptive plans for the earth. I belonged here. The hair rose on my neck. My time was coming. All the things in my life have led up to this very moment and prepared me.

An Orthodox Jew named Yechezkel approached me. He was always here at the Western Wall around this time and greeted me warmly.

“A challenging day for the faithful, isn’t it, Mr. President? Do they even know you’re here?”

“Of course they do. I’m surprised they haven’t tried a drone strike on my home yet.”

“Is there truly that much animosity between you and that dictator?”

“Unfortunately, yes. I took him as my VP to unify our country, which was deeply divided by years of fighting between the Republican and Democrat parties. If we were on the verge of civil war, how were we going to fight a two-front war between China and Russia? We were friendly with each other, but deep down inside he hated me. He always resented my leadership style because it represented something he could never aspire to.”

“Yes, most presidents don’t lead from the front lines these days.”

“While I was on the front lines, he was in the dark conspiring with other Democrats and weak Republicans, searching for a way to oust me and seize power.”

“How did he manage to change the Constitution? I heard he did it by force.”

“Yes, those were dark days, but I believe he’ll soon receive justice.”

“We all believe he’ll receive justice soon. I wouldn’t be praying in front of this wall right now if I didn’t. Hashem will only allow the Jewish people to be tested to a certain extent, and then He will relent, just like He did with Job. I just hope I’m able to survive this and see all the wonderful things Hashem brings about as a result of this one man’s great mistake.”

“I wouldn’t mind seeing the Temple rebuilt.”

“Yes, that’s something to survive for. Maybe together we’ll both survive and measure the outer courts and lay one brick at a time till we reach the inner sanctuary and see Hashem’s glory enter through the eastern gate.”

A loud explosion blasted overhead. A missile almost penetrated the Iron Dome. All those praying by the wall instinctively ducked to the ground, as did I. Two jets, engaged in a dogfight, roared overhead at the speed of sound. The sonic boom that followed was deafening, shaking the very stones of the ancient city. The ground beneath us trembled, and the air was filled with the acrid smell of burning fuel and metal.

The jets screamed past, their contrails carving sharp lines in the sky. The clash of metal and fire above mirrored the turmoil below, where people scrambled for cover. Despite the chaos, the faithful slowly rose, their determination unwavering. The fervent prayers at the Western Wall resumed, voices lifted in unison against the backdrop of destruction.

Yechezkel and I exchanged a glance, a shared understanding passing between us. The hope of seeing the Temple rebuilt was more than just a dream—it was a beacon of resilience and faith. We both knew that our survival, our fight, was about more than just living another day. It was about preserving our heritage, our faith, and the promise of a future where Hashem’s glory would once again dwell in His holy sanctuary.

“We have to believe, Hoshea,” Yechezkel said, his voice steady despite the turmoil. “We have to believe that this is not the end, but the beginning of something greater.”

I nodded, feeling a surge of determination. “We will see it, Yechezkel. We will see the Temple rebuilt and Hashem’s glory returning to Jerusalem.”

As the jets disappeared into the distance, the noise of the battle above was momentarily replaced by the unwavering prayers of the faithful below. The ancient stones of the Western Wall, witness to countless generations of hope and despair, stood strong and unyielding.

It was getting late and I wished to watch the battle take place in the darkened dusky sky. Such a sight one can only witness once-in-a-lifetime so I bid Yechezkel farewell and made my way towards Mt. Olives resisting the urge to walk home and check on Dipti. Instead, I called her on mobile. Luckily there were still signal, although weak, she sounded shaken, but well. She sounded anxious for me to come home but withheld pestering me. Knowing she was okay I quickly made my way up the path towards the mountain.

# Chapter 4

It was dusk when I finally reached my perch on the Mount of Olives. I rested upon the rail, looking down upon Jerusalem. I pulled a packet of cigarettes from my pocket and lit up, blowing a big puff of smoke that resembled the mushroom cloud of a nuke.

A sudden flash of light streaked across the sky as the first nuclear blast lit up the horizon. I quickly glanced away. The mushroom cloud wasn’t as large as I expected; it was a tactical nuke. My phone buzzed with a notification: Iran had also launched an ICBM, but it had frozen midair above Iran and crashed down on Tehran.

I sat there, solemn and contemplative. Memories of Alaska during the Russian invasion flooded back. The sky was on fire, but not like this. It was night, but I swear it was day. Fear and apprehension filled the air. People around me wept and cried, fearful of what tomorrow would bring. Many asked why Hashem would allow this. Did we not keep His Torah and follow His commandments?

Nearby, an Orthodox rabbi and his followers had gathered. They carried candles and began singing hymns:

"You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,

Nor of the arrow that flies by day,

Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,

Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand;

But it shall not come near you.

Only with your eyes shall you look,

And see the reward of the wicked."

The rabbi began to preach, “God was with Moses in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He is with us here while the skies are on fire. He is leading us through this disaster, and He will deliver us."

“Where is my Moshiach? All the nations are gathered against Israel; his time must be near,” cried a man from the crowd.

“He is here, walking among us. He will reveal himself in the time of deliverance,” replied the rabbi.

“The time of deliverance is now! We’re all going to die or worse. Who knows what the goyim have planned for us? What will my children do, where will we hide? It’s better to jump from this mountain than fall into their hands.”

“Have faith, don’t lose hope. Hashem has not brought us back to the Promised Land to destroy us.”

More refugees began to appear on Mount Olives. Soon, a large host had gathered, all anticipating the coming of Moshiach. Never before in the history of the Jewish people was this anticipation greater. They all knew this was the war of Gog and Magog. They knew the armies of the goyim would converge on Jerusalem, but they did not know the horrors they would endure before his coming. A great pit formed in my stomach at the thought. A great sorrow hung over my head. I wished I could save them all before the appointed time, but I knew this was not possible. I knew that what had been prophesied must be fulfilled for the glory of God.

For the war of Gog and Magog is also a judgment on the Jewish people, as World War III had been for the rest of the world. World War III had caused great heat to envelop the earth. The nuclear weapons had caused the atmosphere to disintegrate, allowing more UV rays to penetrate. They said for the longest time that nuclear weapons could not set the atmosphere on fire, but they did it. The damn bastards did it. Now the entire earth is drying up. Farmers’ crops are failing globally. But thanks to Israeli innovation, we have largely avoided this catastrophe.

Israeli scientists developed genetically modified crops that required less water and were more heat-resistant. We tried to share this technology with the world, but the world had put an embargo on Israel, preventing us from trading and sharing our innovations. Israel lived as an island unto itself. While the rest of the world was dying, we continued to flourish. We had the keys to their salvation, but they chose to lock themselves in a closet and slowly die.

The realization of how much danger I was in began to slowly dawn upon me. The Iron Dome was no longer replying to the salvos of enemy missiles and FPV drones. Buildings in Jerusalem began to explode. Israel was now completely defenceless. There was no cover on the mountainside, and I knew we presented easy targets to coalition airstrikes and drones. The paved path I had taken countless times now felt like a treacherous gauntlet.

Suddenly, a loitering drone collided into the crowd nearby. Its blast knocked me over, and the surrounding people were hit directly with shrapnel. Blood and limbs flew everywhere. After my disorientation subsided, I slowly got up and wiped the blood from my face. The crowd began to run toward the city, seeking refuge from the onslaught. FPV drones continued their reign of destruction, buzzing like malevolent hornets.

I chose to lay down and play dead, hoping to avoid detection. The cold pavement felt rough against my cheek, and the scent of smoke and blood filled the air. In the darkness, I could faintly perceive a drone lowly hovering above the crowd, monitoring the destruction. I held my breath, praying it wouldn't notice me.

Nearby, soldiers wearing night vision goggles responded with EMP guns, aiming to disable the drones. Their blue flashes lit up the night, and some of the drones began to drop from the sky like mechanical birds struck by invisible arrows. Seizing the opportunity, I began my descent on foot towards Old Jerusalem. Moving cautiously, I stayed low, using the terrain for cover. The path was steep, and I had to be careful not to slip on the loose gravel mixed with the blood of my fellow citizens.

As I descended, the sounds of chaos echoed from above, but I focused on each step, determined to reach the relative safety of the ancient city. Historic landmarks, once symbols of hope and faith, now seemed like eerie sentinels in the dim light. The Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of All Nations, and the Jewish Cemetery blurred past as I made my way down the mountain.

Suddenly, I was transported back to the Alaskan tundra. The snow crunched beneath my feet as I ran for cover from an incoming mortar strike. Adrenaline surged; old instincts flared. Once a soldier, always a soldier. The deceased from the Jewish cemetery seemed to watch over me, urging me on, beckoning me to finish strong.

My goal was the Lions' Gate, the closest entrance into the Old City from the Mount of Olives. The gate, with its lion carvings, seemed like a beacon of hope amid the destruction. I was almost out of breath. The enemy was no longer above but below, as I struggled to reach safety. I fought my body’s urge to stop and rest. The snow, the wind—they burned my face. War had found me again. The Russian drones were here. Fear and desperation wrapped around me like the layers of clothing I used to protect myself from the harsh Arctic wind. Each step was heavy with the weight of history within these ancient walls. But the desire to save this city and its people pushed me onward.

The closer I got to the Lions' Gate, the more I felt a glimmer of hope. The city's ancient walls presented a facade of protection, the hope of brief respite from the relentless assault above. Finally, I reached the gate, where the thick stone walls and narrow streets provided a hope that the labyrinthine paths would offer security. I finally got a moment to catch my breath, even more fear and uncertainty crept into my heart. One all-consuming, pressing thought pulsated with my heartbeat: my wife. What about my wife? Where is she? We both lived on the dividing line between the Christian and Jewish quarters. In a sense, this was symbolic of our relationship, as she is Christian and I’m Jewish.

As I slipped through the gates, the sounds of the city and the fight against the drones within were growing louder and more intense. It disgusted me that these animals of the UN had no respect for the most holy city of the world. What was Obama thinking? Profaning El Elyon’s future capital, does he not know that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those who curse Israel will be cursed?

Suddenly, there was silence. I figured the attack had ceased, but then the drones began delivering their payloads. Behind the wall adjacent to the Lions' Gate, I slowly peeked around a corner. A larger drone descended, bringing with it a Hunter-Killer Robot. Robots under AI control had advanced significantly in the past decade, now working seamlessly alongside human soldiers.

I could hear the weight of its feet shift upon the concrete as it landed. Its sleek, metallic body adjusted, sensors scanning the urban environment with precise efficiency. Wires and cables coursed through its frame, extending from its head to its appendages. Its humanoid hands grasped a heavy machine gun, and it began picking off targets one by one with incredible accuracy, adjusting its near-perfect aim to compensate for the machine gun’s recoil.

A soldier quickly passed me and, upon seeing the robot, swiftly lay prone and began aiming his EMP rifle at the HKR. As soon as it sensed the soldier, before he even had a chance to aim, a small RPG fired from the side of its body, homing in on the soldier’s position. The explosion was swift and brutal. The soldier was already gone, his weapon still intact on the ground where he had fallen.

Thoughts of my wife raced through my mind, but saving some of these people was more important. I couldn't let the fear paralyze me. I needed to act, to help those around me and to find my wife. Steeling myself, I crouched low and made my way towards the fallen soldier’s EMP rifle. If I could get hold of it, I might have a chance to disable the HKR.

The narrow streets of Old Jerusalem provided some cover, but also felt like a maze. The sounds of the HKR’s heavy footsteps and the occasional bursts of gunfire echoed off the ancient stones. I kept low, moving from shadow to shadow, my heart pounding in my chest. The smell of gunpowder and burning buildings filled the air, mingling with the scent of history and antiquity that always lingered in these streets.

I reached the soldier’s body, the EMP rifle still clutched in his lifeless hands. With a mix of reverence and urgency, I pried it from his grasp. The weapon was heavier than I expected, it had been a long time since I held one of these. I checked the rifle quickly; it seemed operational.

Peeking around the corner, I spotted the HKR methodically navigating the narrow streets, its sensors sweeping for more targets. I took a deep breath, aimed the EMP rifle, and fired. A blue flash burst forth, striking the HKR. For a moment, it paused, its systems disrupted by the electromagnetic pulse. The robot slumped, its mechanical whirring silenced, and it ceased to operate. It was surreal to witness such advanced machinery against the backdrop of an ancient city. Here, the battleground juxtaposed the old and the new, ancient wisdom clashing with modern, progressive thinking. Man was trying to force the hand of God with technology, striving to impose his vision of morality. But the stones of this ancient city are eternal, while the technology here is transient. God’s ways are true and just and endure forever; this robot, like all human creations, will return to dust.

With the HKR disabled, I continued my descent toward the Christian and Jewish quarters. The streets grew narrower, the ancient buildings huddling closer together. The chaos above contrasted sharply with the silent tension of these enclosed pathways. Under the dim street lights I encountered an HKR wedged in an alley, its sensors scanning relentlessly. Dark silhouettes of Orthodox Jews from the buildings above hurled stones and household objects at the robot, desperate to disable it. In response, small RPGs erupted from the HKR, homing in on its attackers' positions. Explosions reverberated through the alleyway as both buildings on either side crumbled onto the HKR. The shouts of the trapped occupants filled the air. The HKR slowly emerged from the rubble, its metallic form battered but operational. I swiftly took aim and fired, the EMP burst rendering another machine lifeless.

I wanted to stop and help the occupants trapped beneath the rubble, but the thought of my wife kept me going. I had to find her, to make sure she was safe. Under my breath, I whispered a prayer to El Elyon, God Most High, seeking His protection and guidance, and help for the people trapped underneath that rubble. The ancient walls of Jerusalem had seen countless conflicts and prayers, and I hoped mine would not go unheard. The faith that El Elyon watched over His people gave me strength as I navigated the perilous streets, determined to reunite with my wife and survive this nightmarish assault.

I finally reached the gate to my home. The gate was already ajar, and I slid right through, reaching the door. It showed signs of damage; someone had forcefully entered. My heart began to race. Keeping my cool, I propped my EMP rifle against the wall outside my home and slowly walked inside, listening carefully. I could hear my wife shouting from the rear of the house.

“Gabor! Get off me! What has gotten into you? How many times have we invited you into our home?”

“Shut up, you Christian bitch! I’ve had my eyes on you since I met you.”

“Gabor! You’ve been drinking, stop it!”

“I’m going to enjoy this before the end of the world. Now come here!”

The struggle intensified. A lamp fell and shattered. I moved slowly, trying not to make any noise. Gabor was a capable soldier despite his flaws. In hand-to-hand combat, he could probably take me down. The door was slightly open, and I peeked inside. I saw him pinning my wife down, her clothes removed from the waist down. He held her down with one hand, trying to remove his pants with the other. His rifle lay on the ground about three to four feet away.

I slowly opened the door further and quickly pulled the rifle away by its buttstock. I placed it firmly against my shoulder and flipped the safety off.

“Get down, Gabor! Get down!”

Gabor turned around, his face displaying shock. He smiled and put his hands up. “Hey, don’t shoot, Tzadik. It's Jewish law to fulfil the marital duties when the husband can’t. Why don’t you have children? Let me help you, friend.”

“I’ve treated you like a son, and you come and disrespect me in my home. Get out!”

“Were going to die tonight Tzadik. You don’t know. The strength of Israel has failed us. Our forces have been completely defeated. Let me enjoy once before I die. I don’t want to die a virgin. Where is your god now Hoshea? I want to die.”

He tried to grab the front of my rifle. I instinctively pulled the trigger. A bullet went into his upper arm. He stumbled back, blood gushing from his wound. He grasped his wound, putting pressure on it. The bullet had exited his body and went through Dipti’s hand. She screamed and clutched her hand in pain.

“Hey, Tzadik, you know the Holy One of Israel shouldn’t kill a fellow Jew.”

Dipti grabbed the bedsheet and quickly tied it around her hand, tightening it as much as possible to prevent blood loss.

“Dipti, come here!”

Dipti pulled up her bottoms and quickly ran from her bed towards me. As she passed Gabor, she murmured, “I forgive you, Gabor.”

“Dipti, hold this rifle and point it at him.”

I moved towards him. He had slumped on the ground with his hand over his wound. “You’re not dead yet, Gabor,” I said as I tore another bedsheet and tied it around his arm. I placed a wooden stick, broken off from one of the chairs, between the knot and began twisting it, creating a tourniquet that effectively stopped the flow of blood.

“Lucky for you it has an exit wound. All we need to do now is get you stitched up.”

The power went off. The city now lay in complete darkness.

“How are we going to reach the hospital with all that’s happening outside?” Dipti said, her hand still throbbing from her gunshot wound.

“We have a first aid kit in the bathroom with a couple of bandages inside and some antibiotic ointment. We’ll bandage both your wounds and see if we can find a doctor or medic outside.”

Dipti left to bring the first aid kit.

“Why are you doing this, Tzadik? Just let me die. I don’t deserve to live.”

“Hashem might still have a plan for you. He had a plan for David despite him being a murderer. You’re going to help me. I need to hide Dipti. The city is going to fall and the women are going to be raped. I need to hide her where nobody else will think to look.”

“And where might that be?”

“The tomb of David, in his sarcophagus.”

“And I’m going to help you lift the lid? Look at my arm, you shot me!”

“One arm is better than nothing. What about your wife’s hand?”

Dipti came in with the first aid kit. I stood up, and she handed me the rifle. I felt as if the danger had passed from Gabor and he had somewhat come to his senses.

“Don’t worry about me, Gabor. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” said Dipti as she began attending to their wounds. Despite what had just happened, she displayed a resilience and fearlessness which I had not expected. She took out the ointment and placed it on his wound and then hers. She began to tightly wrap the bandage around Gabor’s arm. He winced.

“Take it easy, woman.”

“You’re a soldier, right? Why the whining? You brought this upon yourself. We’re all suffering right now because of you.”

I could still smell the alcohol on Gabor’s breath, but it seemed as if Dipti’s selfless love was able to shine through his confusion. He, in turn, responded and realized his drunkenness was a hindrance to us right now and our survival. He was trying to come to his senses. It was as if two people were in Gabor vying for control. One person knew the gravity of the situation and what we must do, the other wished to drink themselves to oblivion, dying pathetically in this hopeless world.

“Yes, yes, I’m a soldier, I must do something, I cannot die like this, I must save you two. I’m a Jew, a descendant of David, of Abraham, of the promise. I must, I must do something. What was I thinking, drinking from depression because we’re losing the war? I’m such a fucking coward. I’m done with alcohol. I’m going to make things right. I’m not going to die a fucking coward’s death.”

“I’ll manage this wound. It was like the time someone stepped on my hand when I was playing cricket with the boys. We should go to the pharmacy and find antibiotics. Hopefully, the pharmacist hasn’t gone into hiding.”

“Yes, good idea, Dipti.”

As they bandaged their wounds and prepared to venture out, the gravity of the situation weighed heavily on them. The city was descending into chaos, but together, they were determined to survive and protect one another.

The three of them stepped out into the night, the darkness pressing in on them. With the Iron Dome no longer functional, the IDF relied on more traditional means of air defense. MANPADS streaked across the sky, their fiery trails ending in explosions that disintegrated enemy aircraft into hundreds of flaming pieces, raining down from the heavens. In the distance, I saw the ominous silhouettes of parachutes descending like a plague of locusts. A relentless stream of tracer fire targeted these floating invaders, determined to prevent their landing and the threat they posed to the rear of the frontline.

The city was a cacophony of distant gunfire and explosions, their echoes bouncing through the narrow streets. Amid the fighting, the power outage cast an eerie silence over Jerusalem, broken only by the occasional scream or shout. The absence of light turned familiar pathways into treacherous shadows, heightening the tension with every step.

We need to move quickly," I whispered, leading the way. "Stay close and keep quiet." I once again felt the weight of the EMP rifle in my hands. I exercised regularly, but not with intensity that could prepare me for this.

Dipti, her face pale but resolute, held onto the rifle with trembling hands. Gabor, now sober and focused, followed behind, his wounded arm cradled against his chest. As we made our way through the narrow alleyways of Old Jerusalem, we encountered other groups of people, huddled together and trying to stay out of sight. The fear was palpable, but so was the determination to survive.

We moved swiftly keeping to the shadows. The pharmacy was dark inside. They moved swiftly, keeping to the shadows. The pharmacy was dark, its windows shattered. Inside, the shelves were in disarray, but there were still some supplies left. We quickly gathered what we needed: antibiotics, bandages, antiseptic, and any other medical supplies we could find.

As we left the pharmacy, a loud crash echoed down the street. A group of armed men appeared; their faces covered with makeshift masks. They were looters, taking advantage of the chaos. They were speaking Arabic. I could tell they were from the Muslim Quarter. They were armed with AKs and moved with a predatory confidence.

Suddenly, they discovered an elderly couple hiding in the shadows. The fear in the couple's eyes was palpable.

"Please don’t shoot, we left our valuables at home. Here’s our home key. Take whatever you want, just leave us alone," the elderly man pleaded, his voice trembling.

One of the looters, speaking Arabic, abused the elderly couple in broken English. With the butt of his rifle, he knocked the woman to the ground. The elderly gentleman tried to intervene but was shot along with his wife, their bodies collapsing onto the pavement.

The looter spat on their bodies. "Occupiers," he muttered in a thick accent.

Dipti was about ready to shoot at them, but I grabbed the top of her rifle, put my finger to my mouth, and shook my head. I took her rifle and gave her my EMP rifle, ensuring she was equipped but didn't act impulsively.

Suddenly, from the darkness, muzzle flashes lit up the air, and the Muslim looters dropped one by one. Fully armed IDF soldiers with night vision goggles emerged, checking the bodies. One of them waved his hand.

"Clear."

We approached this group of soldiers cautiously. They saw us and shouted, "Halt!"

One of them stepped forward, his eyes narrowing as he saw Gabor. "Gabor, is that you?" the soldier asked, recognition dawning on his face as he examined our group through his night vision goggles.

"Yes, it’s me. I got into a nasty spat with an HKR. This couple saved me," Gabor responded, gesturing towards us.

“I thought you were derelict of duty. When you were drinking, you kept going on and on about how you wanted to find some action before you die. We thought you went searching for a prostitute.”

Gabor's face flushed with embarrassment. He cast his eyes downward, unable to meet Dipti's gaze, a wave of shame washing over him. The memory of his reckless words and actions now weighed heavily on his shoulders, contrasting sharply with the gratitude he felt towards the couple who had saved his life.

The other soldiers laughed. easing the tension momentarily. The soldier who recognized Gabor turned to us, his tone becoming serious. "We need to move. The streets aren’t safe, and there’s been increased enemy activity in the area. You three should come with us. The Muslims in the area have been armed by the CIA to undermine our security in the city while operation Gaza Hope is underway. We’ve already killed hundreds of militants in the area. "

I nodded. I looked at Gabor, who seemed more alert now, the alcohol-induced haze lifting. We fell in line behind the soldiers, moving through the darkened streets with caution.

The night was filled with distant sounds of conflict, the eerie silence occasionally broken by gunfire and explosions. The IDF soldiers led us through alleyways and side streets, their movements precise and coordinated. The sense of urgency was palpable; every shadow seemed to hold potential danger.

As we approached a more secure area, the lead soldier turned to Gabor. "We’re setting up a temporary command post nearby. You’ll be safe there, and we can get you medical attention."

"Thank you," Gabor said, his voice sincere.

We reached a fortified building where more IDF soldiers were stationed. The atmosphere was tense but organized. Medics immediately tended to Gabor and Dipti's wounds, and we were given a brief respite. A generator hummed in the background, providing a sense of temporary stability. Despite this, there was a palpable sense of confusion among the soldiers. Many hung their heads low, hands covering their faces in despair. Dipti, ever compassionate, tried to comfort one of the soldiers.

“Is everything all right, son? I’m here if you need to talk.”

The soldier was inconsolable, not responding to her inquiry, his face still buried in his hands.

“Don’t worry, Yeshua is coming back soon, and he’ll make all things right.”

The soldier lifted his head, his eyes red and filled with sorrow. “My family,” he choked out. “They’re all gone. They died in an airstrike in the north. Do you really believe Yeshua is the Moshiach? Is he going to stand on Har Hazeitim and save us all?”

“We believe he’ll ride on a white horse and defeat the Antichrist.”

“Is Obama the Antichrist?” The soldier's question was tinged with desperation.

Dipti looked puzzled and then glanced at me. The unfolding events were not aligning with her expectations.

“I think someone else will stand on top of Har Hazeitim,” I interjected.

“Is that person the Moshiach?”

“I believe so.”

“But I know this passage. That person is described as Hashem.” The soldier's voice trembled with a mix of hope and confusion. “Then is Moshiach both man and God?”

“It’s been done once before. I never thought there could be two Moshiachs,” said Dipti pondering allowed. So, two men, both God incarnate, come at two separate times, one to redeem the souls of men and another to redeem the Jews.”

“The soldier’s face hardened in frustration. “So, there’s another son of God? That’s too much. It’s already hard enough to accept that God has a son. Another one? It’s just too much. This doesn’t make sense to me. I don’t want to talk about this anymore. Thank you for trying to help.”

“My prayers are with you,” Dipti said, still trying to offer comfort. “Don’t worry one day you’ll get to see your family again.”

The soldier got up. A higher-ranking soldier was motioning for him to come check something out.

Gabor came into our dimly lit room. The building shook. The lights blinked and fans rattled. Gabor sat down in front of me. His countenance has changed since we last saw him. He seemed very alert and motivated. He looked at me with a smile.

"They're planning something big. They want to draw out all the militants into open combat. So, they're going to blow it."

"Blow what?"

"It's a secret. But they're asking for volunteers. It's going to be a dangerous mission. If you volunteer, I'll tell you."

"Come on, tell me, and I might volunteer."

"Al-Nusra Mosque. It's heavily fortified, but they're going to do it anyway. Come with us tonight."

“Wait, are you going? What about your arm?”

“They stitched it up and gave me some helluva pain killers. I’m walking on air right now. I feel like I could take on the world. So are you in?”

"Who will watch Dipti?"

"Don't worry, she'll be safe here. Our forces will hold out at least until tomorrow evening. We have time. We'll be back before then. The brass thinks that the Palestinians will be so pissed off after destroying the mosque they'll go into jihad mode, no more hit and run. Let's see."

I pondered for a moment. Al-Nusra Mosque was the one thing standing between us and rebuilding the Temple of Solomon. Why not get a head start on rebuilding the temple? At least now we can lay the foundation.

"What do you say, Dipti? Can you hang out here till I get back?"

"You better come back. Don't have too much fun without me."

"I'm in."

"Great! Come with me, we'll go speak to the commander. He's a smart guy, you'll like him. You can still shoot, right?"

Glaucoma had all but destroyed my right eye. I was partially blind. I had to teach myself how to shoot with my left eye. Shooting with both eyes open allowed me to scan for targets, but with my right eye useless, that was pointless. So, I often shot with my right eye closed.

"I can shoot for sure, but how accurate remains to be seen."

"With the night vision, you just have to point the laser and shoot. As long as your left eye is working, it shouldn't be a problem. It's settled. Let's meet the commander to make sure he's okay with it, but I think he'll be more than happy to welcome you to the IDF."

We made our way through the dimly lit corridors, the hum of the generator a constant backdrop to our hurried steps. The atmosphere inside the fortified building was a mix of tension and determination. Soldiers moved with purpose; their faces set in grim resolve.

As we approached the command center, I could see the flickering light of a map being projected onto the wall, outlining the strategic points of interest. The commander, a tall man with a weathered face and sharp eyes, was in the middle of briefing his team. He paused as we entered, his gaze shifting to me.

"Commander, this is Hoshea. He wants to volunteer for the mission," Gabor said.

The commander studied me for a moment, his eyes lingering on my face, as if assessing my resolve. “I know him, everybody knows him, he’s the only former American president living in Jerusalem. Are you sure you want to fight against America. You’re not a spy for them?”

“Are you crazy? How can I take part in committing genocide against my people. I’m a Jew.”

“That’s debatable, but okay. Can you shoot?"

"I can. My right eye's gone, but I can still shoot with my left."

He nodded slowly. "Night vision gear will help. Just follow the laser sight. This mission is critical. We're counting on everyone to do their part."

I nodded, feeling the weight of the responsibility settling on my shoulders. This wasn't just about revenge or a tactical advantage. This was about paving the way for something greater, something that had been a dream for generations.

"Understood, sir. I won't let you down. I just have one request?"

“What is it, Private?”

“I want to call my mother, sir.”

The commander's eyes narrowed. “We have one remaining satellite and you want to use it to call your mother in America, the nation who’s our greatest enemy?”

I nodded, trying to muster a faint smile.

The commander sighed, rubbing his temples. “Lieutenant, can you give him a secure line? He wants to make a phone call to America.”

The lieutenant, a young soldier working on a computer, glanced up, surprise flickering across his face. He hesitated but then began typing furiously, navigating through security protocols and encryption settings. After a few tense minutes, he finally looked up at the commander and gave a curt nod.

“It's ready. You have five minutes, Private,” the commander said, his voice stern. “Any longer and you might give our position away.”

“Thank you, sir,” I replied, my heart pounding as I took the headset.

The line clicked, and after a few seconds, I heard the familiar ringtone. The sound of my mother’s voice on the other end was like a balm to my frayed nerves, but I kept my words brief, mindful of the time and the risk we were taking.

“Hoshea, thank God you’re okay. I’ve been watching the news, and it’s terrifying what’s happening over there. This country feels so different now. Nobody listens to reason anymore. The youth are only concerned with the latest social justice cause. Where are you?”

“I’m safe, Mom. I’m holed up at a fortified military post. Things are getting desperate here. I’m really worried about Dipti and her safety, but I’m also concerned about you. This isn’t going to end well for America. God’s judgment is coming, and it’s going to be severe. I need you to take Ethan and Rachel’s family and go to Grandma’s house. I had a dream; her home stood strong after a massive earthquake. I think it’s going to happen soon.”

“I’ll take them if I can. I don’t know if they’ll believe me. Ethan thinks the war is stupid, but he keeps it to himself. He doesn’t want to get in trouble.”

“Look, this earthquake is going to be so severe that every building in every nation involved in this war is going to fall to the ground. Get him out of there, get his family out of there, and get everyone to Grandma’s home. This is urgent. My uncles, everyone.”

“I’ll try.”

“I hope our family survives this horrible thing. Stay safe. I know you’re old, but at least try to move with a little bit of urgency.”

“I’m not that old. I can keep up with the best of them, like my mom. Tell Dipti I send my love.”

“I will. I’d love to talk more, but I can’t. You take care. I’ll see you soon.”

“Stay safe, son,” she said, her voice breaking. “I know this will be over soon. I’m praying for you.”

“I love you too, Mom,” I said as the line cut off.

“Sorry I can’t let you have more time than that. I hope you understand,” the commander said.

I nodded, holding back tears.

"Good," the commander replied, a faint hint of approval in his eyes. "Get your gear and be ready. We move out in an hour."

As we turned to leave, I felt a mixture of fear and determination. The stakes were high, but the potential reward was even higher. This was a chance to change the course of history, to take a step towards a future we had all been dreaming of.

"Mom sends her love. Stay safe, Dipti," I said, giving her a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder. "I'll be back before you know it."

"You better," she replied with a small, brave smile. "And don't forget, we have a temple to build."

With one last look, I followed Gabor out of the command center, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

# Chapter 5 Tel Aviv Landing

The waves hit the shore with a relentless cadence, their foam mingling with the blood of those who had come before us, creating a macabre mix of red and white. It was starting to get dark when we set foot on the shore. The salty tang of the sea air was tinged with the metallic scent of blood, a grim reminder of the battles that had raged here. Every step Raskin took was heavy, the sand shifting beneath his boots, as they advanced with a sense of foreboding through the eerie calm that belied the violence that had unfolded mere moments ago.

Waves of drones followed behind the soldiers, some carrying payloads of HKRs, some reconnaissance and loitering drones. The drones began crashing into the beach like flocks of kamikaze seagulls, seeking to die on the shores of Tel Aviv. Many of the HKRs were rendered non-operational due to the force of impact. Only a few managed to land on the sand upright, their lower appendages absorbing the shock. Unfortunately, Raskin's squad's HKR landed on its head, breaking the robot in two. Not having drone and robot support was going to be a significant limitation for them.

Raskin saw the crater marking the epicenter of the nuclear blast, a stark void where life had been snuffed out in an instant. The trenches nearby were filled with blackened, charred bodies still clutching their melted rifles, the horrific aftermath of the explosion. His breath was labored as he struggled through the sand, the mask over his face restricting his airflow. Sweat dripped into his eyes, and he longed to remove the mask to wipe it away, but he knew doing so could mean inhaling the radioactive dust that hung in the air like an invisible specter. His NBC suit clung to him like a wet rag. He knew it was meant to save him, but in the present circumstance, all it did was restrict him.

He felt that at any moment, a sniper from the IDF could open fire from the surrounding buildings that were largely left untouched in Tel Aviv. His fear was justified as a distant rifle shot rang out, and a member of his platoon fell, a bullet having pierced his mask. They quickly took cover in the nearest trench, some landing on scorched bodies that disintegrated into black puffs of ash upon impact.

Sgt. Hess shouted at the lieutenant, his voice barely audible over the chaos. “We need armor fast.” “I’m on it,” the lieutenant replied, scanning the horizon. “The drone strikes are decimating our transports.” “We can’t stay here,” Hess insisted, urgency in his tone.

Artillery volleys intermittently slammed into the beach from concealed positions within the city, sending plumes of sand and debris into the air. Our airstrikes had pulverized many of the tall buildings in Tel Aviv. The skyscrapers collapsed like towers of Jenga, their concrete pillars melting like cheese from the intense heat generated by our precise ordnance. But it still wasn’t enough.

The city’s rubble created ideal hiding positions for the IDF. The head brass hesitated to use nuclear weapons on the city, understanding that an intact city could serve as a crucial transportation and supply hub for our advancing forces.

The lieutenant spoke into his radio, his voice strained. “Command, we need armored support at grid 32-Alpha, ASAP. We’re taking heavy artillery and sniper fire, over.”

As he waited for a response, Raskin took a moment to survey the beach. Bodies and wreckage littered the shore, a grim testament to the fierce resistance they faced. “Armor’s on the way,” the lieutenant finally said, lowering his radio. “We just need to hold out a little longer.” Hess nodded, gripping his rifle tightly. The beachhead was their only hope, and they couldn’t afford to lose it.

The sky turned dark by the time help had come. About thirty minutes later, landing crafts slid across the beach. One landed about five hundred meters away from their position. Its ramp dropped, and the sound of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle rumbled behind them. It moved quickly up the beach, tracks churning through the sand.

The Bradley came to a halt and deployed smoke grenades, creating a dense screen in front of their position. Raskin followed the soldiers ahead, all of them wearing night vision goggles to navigate through the darkness and smoke. In a tight, disciplined single file, they quickly clambered up the lowered ramp into the vehicle, grateful for the momentary cover from the sniper's line of sight. The interior was cramped but offered a much-needed respite. As the last soldier entered, the ramp raised with a mechanical hum, sealing them safely inside the armored protection of the Bradley.

Inside, the air was stifling, a situation made worse by the NBC suits they wore. The squad removed their gas masks, easing the claustrophobia slightly, the soldiers exchanged weary glances; their faces illuminated by the dim interior lights. Raskin took a deep breath, inhaling the unique, funky smell that arises when too many bodies are crammed into a tight enclosed space mixed with the odor of oil and metal. As he sat in his new temporary home, his mind began to wander. He felt the cool metal handle of his pistol in the darkness of the tank. It felt void and lifeless, like the corpses now lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

Almost his entire platoon was dead, lost when the USS Makin Island sank. What had they died for? He wondered. They died for the world's obscene obsession with one of the smallest countries. The UN should be galvanized for other countries oppressing their minorities, like Sudan and the myriad of African nations embroiled in petty tribal genocides. How had Israel bewitched them? Even Sudanese soldiers had joined in, abandoning their genocides for this new one.

Raskin wondered if he'd ever have to use his pistol on a Jew. The very thought gnawed at him, and he resolved to do everything in his power to avoid that possibility, even if it meant sacrificing his own life. Yet, amidst the chaos and despair, a glimmer of hope persisted within him, like light piercing through darkness or a sapling sprouting amidst a landfill.

Raskin had always harbored a simple dream: to be a truck driver. Any truck would do, even a bus. He longed to see the country, to travel the open road, to answer to no one but the deadlines. Life as a truck driver seemed straightforward—be at point A by this time, then get to point B. The open road, the remnants of nature, and the promise of solitude appealed to him deeply.

In these turbulent times, truck driving was fraught with danger. Starvation was rampant, and trucks moved like armoured convoys, many equipped with automated turrets for protection. Desperate people often ambushed state-sanctioned Walmart trucks on the highways, waiting in large groups to raid their precious cargo. This was part of the reason Raskin had joined the military. Combat experience would bolster his resume, making him more attractive to employers in a world where the roads had become battlegrounds.

Desperation had also driven him to enlist. It was either join the army or starve. He had no money for his next meal, let alone to buy his own rig. His plan was simple: survive the military, save enough money, and then set out on his life’s journey, driving food to the privileged during the apocalypse. The thought of the open road, despite its dangers, gave him a sense of purpose. It was a way to escape the present darkness and look forward to a future, however uncertain.

As he sat in the tank, listening to rounds ricocheting off the hull and wondering if the next projectile could be an FPV drone, Raskin clung to his dream. It was a beacon of light, guiding him through the shadows. He would survive this, he told himself. He would see the open road, feel the freedom of the journey, and perhaps, in some small way, help to rebuild the world.

“Why can’t they just nuke these Jews and save us the headache?” Sgt. Hess complained.

“It’s all about politics. President Obama, our gracious and humble leader, wants to be seen as giving the Jews a chance to lay down their weapons peacefully and allow us to occupy them. And then, if they don’t lay down their weapons, we fucking nuke their asses! HOOAHH!” shouted Lieutenant Daniels.

The other soldiers in the tank replied, “HOOOAAHH!” Except Raskin; he was quiet.

Lieutenant Daniels was a young man in his early twenties, fresh out of ROTC. His parents had forced him to join so they could earn social credit points. Having a son as an officer placed them higher in the social hierarchy. Daniels often boasted about the letter of congratulations his family received from President Obama. He had shown Raskin the letter on his phone; it was a typed letter, personally signed by President Obama himself, though Raskin suspected it was generated by AI and the signature copied. Nonetheless, the fact that it came from the President's office was impressive, even if Raskin had mixed feelings about Obama.

President Obama had ended the Civil War in America by incarcerating white Christian nationalists in camps—a move that was essentially a death sentence, as no one ever returned, including Raskin's mother. When the news came on and President Obama appeared, Raskin's father would quickly shut off the TV, purse his lips with a furrowed brow, and retreat to his bedroom. It was clear he despised Obama. Raskin understood his father was trying to hide his emotions and protect himself from being reported, as even children were known to turn in their parents for expressing ill will towards the commander-in-chief.

Raskin’s ten-year-old sister was a staunch Obama loyalist. She was too young to remember how their mother had died, making it hard for her to hold any ill will against President Obama. She suspected their father of disloyalty and kept a continual watch on him. She kept a diary in her room, marking dates and times when their father engaged in suspicious activity: coming home late—mark; playing music loudly while talking on the phone—mark; shutting off the TV during President Obama’s speech—mark; weeping on his wedding anniversary and talking about how much he missed their mother—mark. Anyone who showed sympathies towards those who had died in the camps might possibly be a traitor to the federal government and its democratic policies.

“You might just get your wish Sgt. Hess if enough of you son of bitches die today.” Said Raskin wishing Sgt. Hess would just shut up.

“Don’t forget I saved your ass you kike lover.” Replied Sgt. Hess.

The tank jolted forward, their bodies lurching with the sudden momentum. The sound of the M242 Bushmaster on the Bradley echoed around them, firing relentlessly. The tank halted again, turned left, then reversed.

“You know what, Cpl. Haskin? When all this is over, I'm going to find you a nice kike wife to settle down with and have children,” one soldier said, sneering. “Of course, I'll test drive her first to make sure she’s perfect for you.”

Laughter erupted from some of the soldiers, while others simply smiled.

“I heard kike women hide money in their... well, you know,” another soldier added. “I’m gonna be rich soon.”

The laughter grew louder.

“Listen up, gentlemen,” their sergeant said, cutting through the noise. “Nobody touches a kike woman unless I say so. Your dicks belong to Uncle Sam. I’m pulling rank here. I get a fifty percent share of whatever ‘treasure’ you find. Is that clear?”

Raskin remained silent as the rest of the soldiers chorused, “Yes, sir,” between laughs. He felt a wave of nausea. He was ashamed to be part of this pack of animals, these rabid beasts the UN had unleashed upon Israel.

A Sudanese soldier chimed in, “In my country, we are very poor. You should at least let us have more than fifty percent.”

“I feel sorry for you poor niggers. It’s a done deal I’ll give you seventy five percent, but only on one condition. I get to record you on my go pro, you boys are packin, and ain’t talkin bout your rifle.”

“It would be my honour to represent Sudan in such a way.”

“Oh it will be Bashir, you’re going to get honor all over her face.”

Bashir’s face lit up and a smile spread across his face. Throughout history, sex and violence have often been intertwined. From the Russian rape of Germany at the end of World War II to the brutalities committed in countless conflicts across the globe, this dark relationship has persisted. It was a grim reminder of humanity’s capacity for cruelty, a reality that Raskin found repulsive. Yet, he couldn't deny the unsettling thoughts that crept into his mind. The temptation to take part in the potential rape of Israel, should they achieve victory, seemed enticing. There was a deep, dark male fantasy of exerting complete dominance over a powerless woman and indulging every whim. This thought made him uncomfortable, and he quickly forced it out of his mind. He tried to drown out the voices of his comrades with the words and memories of his mother, which had recently resurfaced amidst the death and destruction.

"Treat any woman like your sister," she used to say, cradling his newborn sister in her arms. "You’d protect your sister if any guy tried to hurt her, right?"

He nodded as if she were speaking to him again there in the tank, grounding him in a moment of sanity amidst the chaos.

“You know, Bashir,” Sgt. Hess continued, oblivious to Raskin’s internal turmoil, “you might have a point. Maybe we should let you poor bastards keep a bit more of the spoils, I’ll make it eighty percent. After all, you’ve earned it, fighting on the front lines and all.”

The other soldiers cheered and laughed; their camaraderie born out of shared depravity. Raskin felt his stomach churn. He knew he couldn't let this slide, but he was unsure how to stand up to his comrades without painting a target on his own back. His heart pounded as he grappled with the right course of action, the weight of his mother’s words anchoring him to a sense of morality he feared was slipping away.

The Bradley jolted again, yanking Raskin from his thoughts. It had come to a halt, and he could tell its guns were blazing. Suddenly, the entire vehicle shook violently, and smoke filled the compartment.

"Open the hatch!" Sgt. Hess shouted. "We’re gonna suffocate in here!"

The tank drivers attempted to open it, but there was a complete power failure.

"Pull the manual release!" the driver yelled from the front of the vehicle.

The soldier closest to the manual release quickly pulled it, and the ramp began to lower. Sgt. Hess gave the signal, and the soldiers filed out into the night, coughing and gasping for air, their night vision goggles casting an eerie green glow.

# **Chapter 6**

President Barack Obama sat behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office, the weight of the world resting heavily on his shoulders. The digital clock on the wall read 3:00 AM, but there was no indication that he would be leaving any time soon. The room was dimly lit, save for the glow of multiple screens displaying real-time updates on Operation Gaza Hope.

"Mr. President, General Monroe is on the secure line," announced his chief of staff, quietly stepping into the room.

"Patch him through," Obama responded, steeling himself for the conversation.

The screen flickered, and the stern face of General Monroe appeared. His expression was grave, a stark contrast to the confident demeanor he usually maintained.

"Mr. President, we’ve achieved initial success with the amphibious landings near Tel Aviv, but the situation remains fluid. The Iron Dome's collapse has left Israel vulnerable, but their ground forces are putting up a fierce resistance. Casualties are high on both sides."

Obama leaned back in his chair, his fingers steepled as he absorbed the information. "What about our strategic objectives, General? Are we on track?"

"We are, sir. The coordinated strikes have disrupted their command-and-control centers, and the coalition forces are steadily advancing. However, we’re encountering unexpected levels of resistance from local militia groups and remnants of the IDF. It’s clear they’re not going down without a fight."

Obama listened intently, his expression grave. The failure of his covert plan to nuke Tel Aviv weighed heavily on his mind. Iran’s ICBM, meant to be a decisive blow, had malfunctioned disastrously, freezing in mid-air and crashing back into Tehran. The subpar materials used in its design, unfit for high-altitude conditions, had turned a potential advantage into a catastrophe.

“With the level of resistance in Tel Aviv,” continued General Monroe, “I fear we could lose a million soldiers. I think the first and second divisions will be completely wiped out. As we speak, the IDF in Tel Aviv is launching a counterattack. If something isn’t done soon, they could push our troops into the sea. We’re doing everything in our power, but the Israelis have developed sophisticated means to block and jam our robots. Our artillery has yet to have any significant effect. The Israelis built extensive tunnels in and around Tel Aviv and to the north. I believe they constructed these tunnels in anticipation of the Iron Dome's failure.”

Obama's mind raced as he processed the grim update. "What about our air support? Can we increase the number of sorties to break their counteroffensive?"

"We’re already running maximum operations, sir. The skies over Tel Aviv are contested, and we’re sustaining heavy losses to their infantry based MANPAD systems. The Israelis are utilizing every resource they have, including outdated systems that are surprisingly effective against our current tech."

Obama was amazed, but he hid his emotions from the general. How was a nation with approximately the same population as his home state of Illinois putting up so much resistance against the united will and forces of the world? Under the advice of his commanders, they recommended taking Tel Aviv intact and utilizing it as a hub for all coalition soldiers. But in reality, he had no such desire. He was just playing a game. He wanted to seem as if he had no desire for the destruction of Israel, but in reality, quite the opposite was true. Underneath his breath, he mumbled, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Obama was in deep thought. The time for covert operations was over. America, on behalf of the world and the coalition whose soldiers’ lives were currently at risk, would have to take charge and consider more drastic measures.

He took a deep breath, his mind swirling with the weight of the decision before him. "General Monroe, it’s time we consider all our options. Prepare a contingency plan for a direct nuclear strike on Tel Aviv. We cannot afford to let this resistance undermine the entire operation. I want every possible scenario on my desk in one hour."

"Understood, Mr. President," Monroe replied, his face reflecting the gravity of the order.

Obama never imagined that he would be responsible for the complete and utter destruction of Israel. If Iran had only been successful, this would not be necessary. He was worried about his approval ratings and how they might be affected when the American public found out that he was responsible for the nuclear strike on Tel Aviv. America’s tolerance for nuclear intervention had greatly increased since World War III, so he expected only marginal concern. To keep concern to minimal levels, he would be careful to limit the devastation to Tel Aviv and the immediate surrounding areas to mitigate whatever disastrous effects this might have on public perception.

What concerned him was the collateral damage. Jerusalem should not be affected by the blast, or there could be significant outcry from the American public. Americans still considered Jerusalem to be the holiest city in the world despite an almost complete absence of faith from public life. He needed to inform the coalition about what was going to happen so they could pull back their troops.

He picked up the secure phone, dialing the coalition command center. "This is President Obama. We need to initiate an immediate troop withdrawal from Tel Aviv and surrounding areas. Prepare all forces for a strategic withdrawal. Details will follow."

After he hung up, Obama lit up a cigarette, the tip glowing brightly in the dimly lit room. He took a slow, smooth drag, feeling the nicotine hit his bloodstream and give him an immediate, intoxicating buzz. It was a rare moment of solace amidst the chaos, a fleeting pleasure that grounded him even as the weight of his decisions threatened to crush him. He loved the high, the thrill, the sense of complete domination that came with holding the fate of nations in his hands.

As he exhaled a plume of smoke, the door quietly opened, and Michael stepped into the room. He moved silently, sneaking up on Barack. Suddenly, he placed a firm hand on Obama's shoulder, causing Barack to jump, startled.

"I thought you quit smoking," Michael said, a mixture of concern and disappointment in his voice.

"I did, Mikey, but the stress of all this got me smoking again," Barack admitted, his voice heavy with the weight of the world.

Barack swivelled in his office chair until he was facing Michael. "You have to start the Nicorette again. This is not good. I had the courage to transform myself, and so do you. Quit those cigarettes," Michael urged, his tone gentle but firm.

Barack nodded, then swivelled back around, quickly putting out the cigarette in the ashtray on his desk. The room was filled with a tense silence as the enormity of the situation hung in the air.

"Michael, soon five million Jews are going to be dead by my hand," Barack said quietly. "I’m going to take the nuclear football, put in my code, and poof. Not even Hitler was able to achieve such a feat in a single day."

"Honey, don’t compare yourself to Hitler," Michael responded, moving closer and placing a comforting hand on Barack's back. "Hitler wasn’t trying to liberate anyone. He was just killing Jews out of fear and paranoia. You’re doing this to free the Palestinians. There’s a big difference."

Barack sighed deeply, the burden of his impending decision pressing down on him. "I know, Michael. But the world will never see it that way. They'll see me as a monster, a tyrant."

Michael squeezed his shoulder reassuringly. "History will judge you, Barack. But you have to do what you believe is right, what you believe will bring peace in the long run. This war has to end, and sometimes, the hardest decisions are the ones that bring about real change."

Barack looked into Michael's eyes, finding a flicker of hope amidst the despair. "You're right. I just hope this is the right path."

Michael leaned in closer, his voice filled with conviction. "Don't worry, Barack. Allah knows your heart. He knows you're trying to please Him. Allah will reward you in paradise. Allah will also give me seventy-two virgins and we will rule together in paradise. Come, let's pray towards Mecca."

Barack took a deep breath, wishing and wanting peace. He stood up from his chair, and together, they moved to the prayer rug that Michael had quietly laid out. They turned to face Mecca, their movements synchronized, a symbol of their unity in purpose and faith.

As they bowed and recited the prayers, he wanted so desperately to feel peace but it eluded him. Doubts and uncertainties filled his mind. The weight of the decision pressed heavily on him, but he knew he must endure these burdens because it was part of Allah’s greater plan. The act of prayer, the rhythm of the words, and the presence of Michael by his side brought him some strength amidst his own weakness.

When they finished, Barack looked at Michael with gratitude. "Thank you, Michael. Your faith strengthens me."

Michael smiled warmly. "We are in this together, Barack. No matter what comes, we face it side by side."

With that, Barack returned to the Resolute Desk, feeling a renewed sense of resolve. He knew Allah was with him. He knew that if Allah was with him, who could be against him. He recalled the verse from the Quran:

"If Allah helps you, none can overcome you; but if He forsakes you, who is there that can help you after Him? In Allah, then, let believers put their trust."

This divine reassurance filled Barack with the courage and conviction needed to face the monumental decisions ahead. The Jews must surely die and he was Allah’s instrument of holy wrath. He had an hour to spare as he waited for the final plan from his generals on how to carry out the nuclear strike. He glanced at Michael's newly created penis, noticing the evident arousal. Michael blushed.

“Isn't it amazing?” Michael asked.

“You're amazing,” Barack replied, his voice filled with admiration.

Michael unzipped his pants, and Barack took Michael's penis into his mouth, savoring the warmth and hardness against his tongue. Michael's hips twitched, his breath hitching as he struggled to contain the pleasure building within him.

As Barack continued his skilled ministrations, Michael's mind wandered back to the time they first met. It was the summer of 1989 at the Chicago law firm Sidley Austin, both young and ambitious, their careers just beginning to take off. Initially, Michael was hesitant about getting romantically involved with Barack, wanting to keep their relationship professional and concerned about the implications of dating someone he was supposed to be mentoring. However, after some time and a few outings, including their first official date at the Art Institute of Chicago followed by a movie, they developed a strong relationship and grew closer than brothers. The thought of sharing such an intimate moment now, with the weight of the world on their shoulders, filled Michael with a sense of connection and purpose.

Outside, the sounds of the world beyond their private sanctuary seemed distant, almost muffled. Within these four walls, it was just the two of them, lost in a moment of primal connection.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door, and the Secretary of State walked in after a brief pause, intruding on their private sanctuary and shattering their moment of bliss with concerns of war. He tried to walk away, but the pressing concerns stopped him in his tracks, making him wait with his back turned to the love-stricken couple. They quickly adjusted themselves; Michael hurriedly pulled up his pants and zipped them. Barack coughed and quickly moved his chair to the Resolute Desk. Michael retreated to an opposite door, fleeing like a refugee from the site of a battle. Barack composed himself and, when ready, addressed Sean, whose back was still turned.

“What is it, Sean?”

Sean, a white person appointed as Secretary of State as part of a diversity inclusion initiative, forced himself to overcome the awkwardness of the situation and pretend that moment never happened.

He turned to face Barack; his expression serious.

“I spoke with General Monroe. He mentioned you plan on releasing the Kraken on Tel Aviv. We conducted a late-night poll and found that ninety of Americans support your decision to launch a nuclear strike.”

“You executed the other ten percent, correct?”

“Yes, sir. Firing squads were assembled, and the dissenters and their families were shot. Their identities have been erased from all records. Their state-sanctioned jobs have already been filled by loyal citizens.”

“Excellent. Did I ever tell you that you're my favorite house whigger? Your precision and dedication to getting things done is absolutely astounding.”

“Thank you, sir. Serving you and living in the White House servant quarters has been a privilege. Without your patronage, my family might not have survived the great purge.”

“Oh, it’s nothing. Just doing my duty as an American citizen. We need white people around to do the dirty work, after all. And don’t play the victim card on me. Critical race theory only applies to Blacks. Understand?”

“Yes sir, but I think the situation in Tel Aviv is very pertinent………”

“Don’t interrupt me, boy.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, tell me what the general has to say regarding our contingency plan.”

“He says there are about 100,000 of our soldiers trapped within the city, their communications cut off due to IDF jamming measures. It could take a couple of days before we can re-establish contact with them. Once that happens, we can safely withdraw all our soldiers.”

“Ask the general if those are white units trapped in the city or units of color.”

“Just a moment, sir.” The Secretary of State quickly got on his phone. Barack leaned back in his chair, folding his hands behind his head and propping his feet up on a nearby chair, relaxing. He couldn’t get the encounter he had with Michael out of his head. If only this dumb cracker hadn’t come in and interrupted—what sweet bliss, what passion.

He momentarily considered finding a new house whigger, one who knew how to knock and wasn’t so impetuous with the work at hand. He needed someone who could sit back, relax, and enjoy the moment—someone like him. Or perhaps he could improve Sean, teaching him new tricks like the white Husky he and Michael had just adopted. There were also mental implants, neural links, that could control certain parts of people’s minds. If Sean tried to enter the Oval Office without permission, a targeted shock could shoot down his spinal cord, ensuring compliance.

Barack’s mind wandered back again to Michael, remembering the intensity of their connection. The passion they shared was unparalleled, a union of two powerful figures at the height of their dominance. His thoughts were interrupted by the Secretary of State, who had finished his call.

“Mr. President, the general confirmed that the trapped soldiers are predominantly white units.”

“Well, the longer we wait, the more colored units will be put at risk. I think we should nuke Tel Aviv immediately. Losing 100,000 out of 20 million soldiers is an acceptable sacrifice. Inform the general: make sure all units have withdrawn to a safe distance then we proceed with the strike.”

Obama noticed tears welling up in Sean’s eyes.

“Do you want to say something, Sean?” Obama asked, his tone measured but firm.

Sean’s mouth opened, words forming but stalling as fear took hold. Realizing these could be his last words, he chose them carefully. “Nothing, sir. I was just thinking,” he paused, his voice trembling slightly, “What a bold and decisive move, sacrificing the lives of white soldiers for the protection of colored soldiers. It’s a profound act of reparation for the past sins of our forefathers.”

Obama studied Sean for a moment, sensing the fear in his tone. The control he had over Sean made him long to be dominated by Michael. “Indeed, Sean. It’s a necessary step toward a more just world. We must be willing to make hard decisions for the greater good.”

“Yes, sir,” Sean replied, his voice steadier now, though his heart still pounded in his chest.

“Great, when the troops we’re still in contact with have withdrawn to a safe distance I’ll get this show on the road. Immediately notify me when this has been accomplished.”

As soon as Barack was done, Sean began making a flurry of calls.

As Sean turned to leave, Lieutenant Commander David Reynolds, the officer currently carrying the nuclear football, entered. He was a composed and unassuming figure, chosen for his calm demeanour and impeccable record.

He pulled up a chair and sat beside Barack.

“How you doing Dave.” Barack said trying to pass time.

“Doing fine Barack. So, we’re nuking Israel today?” He said casually.

“It does look like it, Dave. I sure do miss your wife’s fried chicken. She’s a damn good cook. When are we getting together again to have a cookout?”

“Well, you know, after we get done killing 5 million Jews in the Promised Land.” He shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

“It’s justified, right?”

“Oh, I mean totally. This is the final solution for Palestine, is it not?”

Barack was silent, looking at Dave to see his reaction. They both knew the answer to the question, but Barack wanted to see if Dave believed it too.

“Hey, wasn’t your wife’s grandfather Jewish, half Jewish? Doesn’t that make your wife Jewish?”

“No, he married a woman who wasn’t Jewish.”

“Well, that would make her a quarter Jew, wouldn’t it?”

“I’m not going to let you do this, sir. How do you feel knowing that you ate fried chicken from the hands of a black Jew? Your enemy.”

“Dave, I know what you want to do right now and I can assure you all precautions have been taken. The bullets in your gun, well, they’re blanks. We go back a long way. I already knew this about your wife, but I overlooked these things. I want to see things work out between us.”

Lieutenant Commander Dave pulled out his sidearm and began pulling the trigger. Loud shots resounded in the Oval Office. After all the blanks had been exhausted, Obama sat there unharmed, looking smugly at him.

“It’s a shame, Dave, we can’t continue to work together. Your wife is being taken care of as we speak. She’ll reach the camp any time soon. I expected this response out of you, but you know me, I like to hope against all hope that maybe there was a true American wandering there inside of you.”

“True American? You teach me about being a true American? We took in as refugees the very Jews who created the weapon you are soon going to use against them, you bastard.”

Barack leaned back in his chair, unfazed by Dave's outburst. "Dave, this isn't about personal vendettas or grudges. This is about ensuring a future where the oppressed can finally breathe free. Sacrifices must be made for the greater good, even if it means hard choices."

Dave's face was a mask of rage and disbelief. "You think you’re a hero, don’t you? You’re just another tyrant, hiding behind your twisted version of justice."

"Believe what you want, Dave. History will judge us. And history is written by the victors."

The tension in the room was palpable, a standoff between two men who once called each other friends. Barack’s calm demeanor contrasted sharply with Dave’s barely-contained fury.

The president’s voice softened, almost as if he were speaking to an old friend. "It's over, Dave. You can't stop what's already in motion. The future is ours to shape."

Dave's shoulders slumped in defeat, the fight leaving his body. He knew he had lost. "What kind of future are you creating, Barack?"

"A future where the oppressed rise and the oppressors fall. A future where justice isn't just a word, but a reality," his hand playing with and twisting a small device with a button that rested in his pocket.

Dave stared at Barack, the weight of his failure pressing down on him. "God help us all."

He dropped the gun and lunged at Obama, ready to choke him to death. But before he could reach him, Barack pushed a button on a small device in his pocket. Dave's body dropped to the carpet like a rock, twisting and contorting as a small amount of electricity coursed through his spinal cord, disrupting his body's function and coordination.

"You gonna die, you mothafucker," Dave forcefully said, his lips barely able to form the words.

Sean entered the Oval Office with another officer and several security guards, their handguns pointed at Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds.

"What do you want me to do with him, sir?"

"Take him out back on the White House lawn. Shoot him."

"You bastard! God will—" Before he could finish his sentence, a soldier hit him with the butt of his handgun, knocking him out.

The soldiers grabbed each of his arms and dragged him out of the office.

"Sir, Major General Washington will be helping you today with the football. General Monroe says we're clear now," Sean said and quickly walked out, trying to catch up with the soldiers escorting Reynolds.

"Major General Washington," Obama acknowledged, "it's time. Prepare the football."

Obama took a deep breath, steeling himself for the monumental task ahead. "Remember, Sean, history will judge us by our actions and our commitment to justice. This is a war for the future of the Palestinian people, to free them from their oppressors. For the future peace and stability of the world, we must be unwavering in our purpose."

His words hung in the air, thickening the atmosphere in the Oval Office. The weight of the impending decision loomed over them like a dark, foreboding cloud.

The President turned to the military aide, the custodian of the nuclear football. This innocuous-looking briefcase held the power to reshape the world. The aide stepped forward, his face a mask of solemn duty.

"Mr. President," he said, opening the case to reveal its contents: a secure satellite phone, various communication tools, and a set of authentication codes.

Obama retrieved the "biscuit," a card containing unique codes, from his pocket. His hand trembled slightly as he held it up. Many nukes were launched during World War III, but this was the first time he was responsible for doing so. Having such immense power in his hands was overwhelming. He always imagined approaching this moment fearlessly, but now he felt his courage falter. He murmured under his breath, “Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar…” He glanced at Major General Washington, who stood rooted to the spot, a mix of fear and awe in his eyes. Obama knew this moment would be etched into the annals of history; his eternal salvation depended on it.

"First, we need to verify my identity," Obama said, his voice steady but low. He read out the codes from the biscuit, and the military aide confirmed them against the pre-authorized codes. This step ensured that the person ordering the launch was indeed the President of the United States.

With the authentication process complete, Obama turned to the secure phone and initiated a direct line to the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon. "This is the President. Authenticate my identity and prepare to receive the launch order."

The response was immediate and precise. "Yes, Mr. President. Please proceed with authentication."

Obama once again provided the codes, which were meticulously cross-checked. The confirmation came back swiftly, the weight of it settling over the room. "Identity confirmed. We are ready to receive your orders."

He consulted briefly with General Monroe and other top military advisers who had gathered on a secure video link. Their faces were grim, understanding the magnitude of the directive about to be issued.

"We need to initiate the launch plan for a nuclear strike on Tel Aviv," Obama stated firmly. "The target is to be selected based on the current threat assessments and strategic objectives."

The order was encoded, detailing the specific war plans and the single target. It included every necessary detail, from the timing of the launch to the precise coordinates. Obama read through it carefully, ensuring that there could be no mistake.

The encoded order was transmitted to the National Military Command Center and other command centers for verification. These centers acted as the vital nodes in the chain of command, ensuring the legitimacy and accuracy of the order.

The final step involved the execution of the order. The commanders of the nuclear forces—those controlling the land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers—received the authenticated launch directive. Each commander verified the order using the unique codes, following through with the strict protocol to confirm its authenticity.

"All commanders have confirmed receipt of the order," the voice on the other end of the secure line reported.

Obama took a moment to breathe, feeling the weight of his decision pressing down on him. In the heat of the moment, something struck him, and he quickly snapped out of a tense dream and back into reality.

"Hey, General Monroe, before we launch, can I get a live feed of the nuke striking Tel Aviv? I want to see its destructive power in all its glory."

"Yes, sir. We'll have one of our drones stream the explosion live."

An aide came in and gave Barack an iPad streaming the event live.

Barack pulled out his BlackBerry. He called Michael.

"I want you to come downstairs to see the fruit of our labor."

A few moments passed, and Michael entered the Oval Office and sat on Barack’s lap.

"What am I watching?"

"It’s a surprise."

Barack took a deep breath.

"Execute the launch," he said, his voice steady and resolute.

In a matter of moments, a Minuteman ICBM would launch, carrying the destructive force capable of annihilating Tel Aviv and its suburbs.

The coalition was forced back to the beaches. They began to retreat to a position about a 1 mile from the beach waiting for further orders in their landing craft. Rather than risk the death of more coalition soldiers America launched one Minuteman ICBM and completely destroyed Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas in a 22-mile radius. With ease the soldiers of the coalition quickly drove their convoys and heavy equipment through the charred remains of the city. Naked, bloody corpses with burns wandered aimlessly in the city like zombies. Wandering dead. Humvees purposely rammed into them joking with each other on the way.

“That’s ten points a Jew, soldier.”

“I’m going to set a world record Sarge.”

A loud thump hits the Humvee. A Jew flies over the bumper and lands discombobulated on the ground behind it, and mass of flesh twisted in a contorted pretzel.

“Want to make a bet that I can reach thirty.”

“Sure private you’re on.”

Another corporal from the backseat interjects,

“Sarge, so the Jews killed Jesus, isn’t this sweet revenge.”

“Sure is Lance Corporal. In the name of our Lord all these great and wonderful nations have gathered here to purge this wickedness on the earth.”

“But wasn’t Jesus a Jew?” The private said hesitantly for fear of being rejected.

“Jesus was Aryan, no god damn Jew, you remember that boys.”

Whatever remained of the IDF made their last stand on the Sharon plains.

A smoky haze hovered across the Sharon plains. Without the support of the Iron Dome and Israeli Air Force, coalition jets launched missile after missile. Drones swarmed from every direction slamming into tanks and soldiers hunkered in trenches. The battlefield situation deteriorated into a turkey shoot. Due to their distance from Jerusalem the coalition refrained from using nukes. It took two hours for the coalition forces to destroy what remained of the Israeli Army. The speed with which the coalition army operated was even greater than Operation Desert Sabre when the Iraqi Army was defeated in four days.

We’ve spent the past couple of days combing through the twisted charred bodies strewn amidst the ruins of Tel Aviv. The mounds of broken bodies filled with Americans, Russians, Iranians, Germans, and a multitude of nationalities among the seventy-nation coalition all gathered here to implement the final solution. Their plan, which almost succeeded, was to conquer Israel and divide it into Israel and Palestine. Palestine would have Gaza and Jerusalem while the remaining Jews who survived would carve out a meek existence among the nuclear wasted ruins while the other remnant would have been scattered among the nations in slavery. Their plan failed.

“Sir we’ve found his body!”

I stood at the peak of Mt. Olives. The mountain split to make a way. The children and their mothers fled for their lives. Sulfur came down. F-55’s and F-35’s lost control and crashed into each other their hulking carcasses falling to the ground. Satellites with their enclosed nukes crashed on the nations who thought they were above the almighty. Entire nations pulverized in a minute.

“Sir what shall we do with his body!”

I walked up to the group of soldiers, some of the last remaining IDF left in the world. They had all gathered there like a solemn congregation who had gathered there to witness a venerated member of the congregation who had recently passed to away. They were scared to touch his body, to desecrate it, even after all the evil this man had done. They thought by doing so it might spring to life and kill the last few survivors of the Jewish race. I looked down. I saw his pearly white teeth and eyes shining like white stars amidst his dark and blistered skin. What a fool he was.

# Chapter 7

Raskin’s heart raced as he clawed through the darkness, the fire of burned-out buildings and destroyed vehicles casting flickering shadows that guided his way. The stench of burning rubble and singed metal saturated the air, interwoven with the sharp, coppery scent of blood. The rest of the squad scanned their sectors through their night vision goggles, the eerie green glow highlighting the devastation around them. The sector they were in was the furthest into the city, one of the spearheads of the invasion. Gunfire and tracers streaked across the night sky, intermittently illuminating the chaos. Dead bodies of civilians and soldiers lay scattered, their forms twisted and lifeless. The moon’s gentle light was blocked out by the smoke rising from the city.

Raskin prayed fervently that they could avoid contact with the enemy, but his hopes were shattered as a Merkava tank, flanked by a platoon of infantry, advanced toward their position under the cover of night. The ground trembled with each lurching step of the tank and its accompanying troops; their silhouettes barely discernible without night vision in the dim moonlight, which made Raskin even mor fearful being unable to see the unknown.

Sgt. Hess conferred urgently with Lieut. Daniels. Raskin could overhear their low, tense conversation, filled with a sense of desperation. Typically, they would call in an airstrike, but their communications had inexplicably failed.

Sgt. Hess moved quietly beside Cpl. Raskin. “Here’s the situation. We’ve got one AT-4 and one Javelin. We need to trick that tank into deploying its countermeasures while the rest of the squad lays down suppressing fire. The lieutenant wants me to take one half of the squad and you the other.”

Raskin nodded, swallowing hard. “Understood, Sergeant. What’s the plan?”

“We’ll split up. I’ll take position on the left flank with three men. You take the right with the rest. We’ll fire the AT-4 first to trigger the tank’s countermeasures. As soon as they activate, you hit it with the Javelin. Timing is everything.”

Raskin briefed his men, masking his reluctance with feigned enthusiasm to maintain their morale. Despite his inner conflict, he felt the weight of their trust. He handed the Javelin to Bashir, who clung to it tightly, ready to launch at a moment’s notice. Sgt. Hess and his team crawled low, taking position in a burnt-out building opposite their location. The tank’s rumble grew louder, accompanied by the steady march of enemy boots.

Cpl. Raskin waited, adrenaline pumping through his veins, anticipating Sgt. Hess’s signal. He gripped his pistol, resolved to fire above the enemy’s heads, conflicted by his reluctance to engage in violence against the Jewish soldiers.

The AT-4 launcher barked, sending a rocket streaking toward the tank. As predicted, the Merkava’s countermeasures activated, deploying smoke and flares to confuse incoming threats.

“Now, Raskin!” Hess shouted.

“Bashir, engage the target.”

Bashir shouldered the Javelin, using its thermal imaging sight to lock onto the tank through the haze and darkness. He squeezed the trigger, feeling the powerful recoil as the missile launched. It arced through the air, its guidance system compensating for the smoke and flares. The missile struck the tank squarely, a blinding explosion rocking the ground.

“Suppressing fire, now!” Raskin commanded, his men opening up with their rifles and the squad's M249 SAW, pinning down the infantry accompanying the tank with a spray of bullets that had them completely caught off guard.

The tank smoldered, its turret lifeless. The enemy infantry, stunned by the loss of their armored support, initially hesitated. But they quickly recovered and began returning fire with fierce intensity, their numbers making the situation dire for Raskin's squad.

Amidst the chaos, Bashir, who had bravely launched the Javelin, was struck by enemy fire. Raskin saw him fall, clutching his wound, his face contorted in pain. He crawled over to Bashir, but it was too late. The life had already drained from his comrade's eyes. The loss hit Raskin hard, his death a meaningless waste of life, whose death was a sacrifice to the gods of the new world order imposing itself on a peaceful people. Raskin then took Bashir’s night vision goggles so he wouldn’t be clueless as to the enemy’s position.

Sgt. Hess, meanwhile, had maneuvered his team into a perfect flanking position. With the enemy focused on Raskin’s squad, Hess’s team opened fire from the side, catching the enemy column by surprise. The sudden onslaught threw the enemy into disarray, their formation crumbling under the unexpected assault.

“Push forward!” Hess ordered. “Keep up the pressure!”

Raskin led his half of the squad, moving from cover to cover, systematically engaging the disoriented enemy soldiers. Despite their numerical disadvantage, the squad utilized the urban terrain to their advantage, exploiting every bit of cover.

The firefight was brutal and intense. The squad worked seamlessly together, but the sheer volume of return fire from the enemy was overwhelming. Sgt. Hess and his team managed to ambush a flanking maneuver by the enemy, buying crucial time.

The enemy, now under fire from two sides, began to falter. The combined firepower and tactical positioning of Raskin and Hess’s squads created a lethal crossfire. The enemy infantry, realizing their untenable position, started to retreat, their advance broken.

After what felt like an eternity, the gunfire ceased. The squad stood amidst the wreckage, breathless and victorious. The silence of the aftermath hung heavily in the air, the flickering flames of the battlefield casting long shadows over the weary soldiers.

Sgt. Hess stood with a sullen look on his face as he looked down on the body of Bashir. “I was only going to take ten percent of his spoils,” he muttered bitterly. “I didn’t give him permission to die, goddammit.” He kicked at the dirt, frustration evident in his every move. Hess checked the radio again in an attempt to call in a medevac, but there was still no response from command.

Some of the IDF were wounded. Their groans and pain filled Raskin’s ears with an ocean of sorrow.

“I have orders from command to not take prisoners,” said Lieutenant Daniels stoically. “So put them to sleep as humane as possible like you would a dog or horse or something. One quick shot to the head and that’s good. Don’t torture them, I’m not bloodthirsty.”

Shots echoed off the surrounding buildings as the wounded IDF were shot.

One IDF soldier who had been wounded in the leg pleaded with them, “I have a wife, a child, please don’t kill me.” Private Lot looked down at the Jew with a cold, hard stare. He was building up courage. Hey sarge, he’s just a monster right, a beast of the field. Pvt. Lot looked at him for affirmation. Sgt. Hess nodded his head and looked at the wounded Jew with the same cold-hearted murderous intent.

“Please, I’ll show you them,” he reached in his pocket to show them something, but then a gunshot rang from Lot’s rifle. Then there was silence as the bullet meant for the wounded Jew’s head found its mark.

Raskin surveyed the body of the dead Jew whose hand was in his pocket through his NVG. The green tint of his body made his corpse look surreal, as if he was a painting lying on the concrete. The jew’s white skin was ghostlike as white as his own skin. He felt a bitter satisfaction knowing that not a single Jew had died by his hand. However, a part of him wished he could have done more for him without jeopardizing his own life. Turning on his fellow soldiers was not an option, but he found himself increasingly disgusted by their behaviour.

The squad began looting the fallen IDF soldiers for ammunition and other supplies. One of the IDF soldiers was a female.

“Hey, Cpl. Raskin, check her and see if she keeps money in her ‘who-hah’,” Sgt. Hess said, his tone dripping with derision.

Cpl. Raskin shook his head.

“Oh that’s right, you’re a kike lover.”

“I’ll do it!” Private Lot said with enthusiasm his first taste of combat making him bloodthirsty.

The private began checking her body. Raskin turned away in disgust.

“No Sarge, I think she’s a poor kike,” Lot replied, eliciting laughter from some of the men.

“Holy fuck, I didn’t realize they had those.” His voice sounding astonished. “I’ll write home and tell my woman this, she’ll shit her pants.”

Raskin clenched his fists, fighting the urge to speak out.

Other soldiers began trying to pull out gold teeth. Sgt. Hess got really excited.

“Look at this it’s an iPhone 38+A, with holographic camera. But I can’t unlock it. I know.”

Sgt. Hess reached down and grabbed the corpse’s thumb and unlocked the phone. He quickly began swiping trying to change the security measures so they worked around his hand.

“Goddamnit, now requires passcode. How to unlock one of these fucking phones.”

“I got a friend back home who can hack that for you,” said Pvt. Lot, “Just hold onto it we’ll get you squared away.”

“I got an idea, I’ll just take this soldiers thumb with me.”

Sgt. Hess took out his K-BAR knife and began sawing at his thumb like dog chewing meat off a bone. Finally, the thumb gave way. Sgt. Hess took out a Ziploc bag in his pocket and put the thumb inside.

“As long as I got his thumb, it’ll make cracking the phone that much easier. Right Lot?”

“Good idea Sarge, you’re always top of your game.”

Sgt. Hess was incredibly happy like a child who’d just received their long waited for gift on Christmas. “I’ve been waiting my entire life for one of these. I can’t afford this. I got a wife and two kids. Not only that, you know how they pay white soldiers. Even being a Sergeant my pay ain’t shit.”

“You got that right Sarge. I can hardly pay for a night at the strip club. While colored soldiers, hell, they’re high rolling. They get all the fine bitches. I’ll be getting a lap dance when a large group of niggers roll in, she’ll just jump right up and start serving them like I didn’t even exist. It ain’t fair I tell you. I want to color my skin black. I’m tired of being a whigger,” said Lot as a gold tooth just gave way. Lot fell backwards much to the chagrin of other soldiers.

“Even if you paint yourself black, you can’t get rid of that whigger inside of you. It’ll come out as soon as you talk. Once you start talking about hiking through the woods, hunting squirrels, they’re going to smell that whigger scent like shit in a dumpster.”

Everyone started laughing, even Raskin bust out a little laughter.

Pvt. Lot got up and dusted himself off. “Fuck all yall. You never seen Tropic Thunder? Robert Downey Jr. played a damn good nigger. If I just practice for a month, I can kill that whigger inside of me.

"Alright, that’s enough, gentlemen," Sgt. Hess barked, his voice cutting through the camaraderie like a knife. "We are on a mission. We’re supposed to arrive at the center of Tel Aviv at 0500. At this rate, we're nowhere near our objective. Let’s get a move on."

The soldiers stopped their looting, picked up their packs, and got in formation. The daunting task of urban warfare lay before them like a giant mountain they had to scale. The ruins of the city loomed ahead, each building a potential hideout for enemy snipers and ambushes. The air was thick with the smell of smoke and the echoes of distant gunfire, reminding them that danger lurked around every corner.

The war had twisted their morals, turning them into something unrecognizable, but even monsters find humor in the situation they’re in. Raskin resolved to survive this, but he knew that, no matter the outcome, he would never forget the horrors he had witnessed.

As they advanced, the eerie silence of the abandoned streets was punctuated by the crunch of their boots on shattered glass and debris. The once-bustling city now stood as a stark reminder of the cost of war. Buildings were reduced to skeletal remains, cars abandoned and burned out, and the occasional flicker of movement in the shadows kept everyone on edge.

After half a click of walking Raskin and his squad stacked up against a building adjacent to another structure that once housed a café on the bustling streets of Tel Aviv. The Starbucks sign remained intact, a stark reminder of the normalcy that once existed. Fighting had not yet reached this area, but the tension was palpable. Sgt. Hess, taking the lead, checked the door and found it locked. He then proceeded to break the window with the butt of his rifle. The sharp sound of shattering glass was quickly followed by the crunching of shards underfoot as they cleared the glass and stepped over a low wall.

Inside, the café was eerily quiet, its interior lit only by the dim glow of emergency lights and the flickering flames outside. The smell of stale coffee and baked goods lingered. Driven by hunger, they began eating the cakes and croissants stored in the lower glass casing, now covered in a thin layer of dust. Several squad members remained on overwatch, their eyes scanning for any movement through the cracked windows.

Those who looted shared with others who were on overwatch and the squad took a quick break to understand their location and where they were going in relation to other units. The radio crackled with static, refusing to transmit.

“This goddamn radio still won’t work. I can’t contact anyone. Even this GPS... where the fuck are we?” Sgt. Hess muttered; frustration evident in his voice. “Do you think the kikes jammed everything we have?”

Lieut. Daniels, equally perplexed, rubbed his face vigorously, his eyes bloodshot from exhaustion. He bent backward, stretching, then shook his head in an attempt to clear his thoughts.

“Sgt. Hess, can we send some of our guys up one of these tall buildings to figure out where we are? I have no idea where the enemy could be.”

“I do have a map of the city, but I can’t read Hebrew to figure out what these streets are called. Any of you motherfuckers know Hebrew?”

“I think your mom does,” Raskin said, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Go fuck yourself, corporal,” Hess shot back, not missing a beat.

Sgt. Hess stared at the map; his brow furrowed as he tried to recognize any landmarks that might give them a hint about their location. Finally, with a sigh of defeat, he stuffed the map back into his pack.

“Guess what, corporal? That comment about my mom just volunteered you to climb up one of these buildings and find out where the fuck we are.” Sgt. Hess pointed at a tall, looming high-rise apartment building across the street from them. “Pvt. Lot you go with him.”

The lobby's automatic doors were malfunctioning, so Corporal Raskin smashed the glass and stepped inside. Private Lot followed close behind, cradling his shotgun with the same youthful enthusiasm he once had for hunting squirrels on his family farm, except now, he was hunting Jews. Pvt. Lot, with his curly red hair and freckles, stood about the same height as Raskin, who was just shy of six feet tall.

The elevator was out of order, forcing them to find the emergency access stairwell and begin their ascent. They moved as quietly as possible, the emergency lights casting a dim, flickering glow that made the stairwell feel like the set of a low-budget horror movie. Raskin winced with every step, the wound he received on the ship still aching with small stabbing sensations despite being treated with stitches and antibiotics. He was shocked he had made it this far, but he gritted his teeth and pushed through the pain. Determined to make it out of this alive, he knew that once this nightmare was over, he needed immediate medical attention.

Pvt. Lot wasn't the quiet type, and Raskin could sense he wanted to speak, but Lot steeled himself and kept his mouth shut. Lot had a strong affinity for anything Irish, often reminiscing about Notre Dame football, lamenting the days when Notre Dame was still Catholic. Catholicism had ceased to function as a church after the Vatican was destroyed in a nuclear strike by Russia.

Raskin wondered if anyone else was still living in the building. On their way there, they had seen few civilians, assuming many of the Jews were hiding in shelters. As they climbed, he could hear voices coming from behind one of the doors on a mid-level floor. He quickly peeked through the window looking down the hallway. A woman was holding her daughter, making her way towards his position. As soon as she saw his face peeking through the window, she quickly turned around and ran back into her apartment.

The sight of the woman and her daughter tugged at something deep within Raskin. He felt a pang of guilt, a brief moment of humanity piercing through the hardened shell of a soldier. He thought about the faces of the dead Jewish soldiers he had seen earlier, their green-tinted corpses under his NVGs. He wondered if they were the wife and daughter of one of those dead soldiers. Maybe he could console her, tell her everything’s going to be all right, but he knew it wasn’t. He had a bad feeling in his gut at the moment. Something wasn’t right.

As they made their way into the city, the air strikes and artillery became less frequent. Now the only sounds were the sporadic bursts of gunfire, the exchange of tracers lighting up the night, and the heavy grinding of IDF and coalition machine-gun fire. If this was a full-on invasion, all hell should be breaking loose. The coalition had air superiority, so why weren’t they supporting them? There were so many questions swirling in his mind, but the lack of communication with command made answering those questions impossible.

Private Lot's footsteps behind Raskin were heavy, contrasting with Raskin’s light steps. It was as if Lot was intentionally making noise to lure an unsuspecting Jew out of hiding so he could pump them full of buckshot and claim his trophy. Raskin doubted that they were the actual monsters hiding in the dark. The flickering emergency lights cast eerie shadows on the walls, each step echoing in the silence. It was as if this low-budget horror film was going to crescendo, with the hunter secretly stalking their prey finally pouncing to kill them. But to Lot’s visible dismay, they reached the service door to the roof without incident.

“I was going to kill me a kike, but they’re all playing hide’n’go seek,” he grumbled as he tried pushing open the service door.

The door was stuck, so Pvt. Lot and I stepped back and lunged forward at the same time, kicking the door with all our force. It burst open, revealing a sweeping panorama of the city under siege by all the world.

We took our time to catch our breath, taking in the fresh air that was refreshing compared to the smell of death below. I closed the door behind us and looked down on the street. I could see Sgt. Hess laying prone on the ground close to a destroyed IDF transport truck.

The scene below was chaotic. The flickering fires from the wreckage cast an orange glow on Hess, making him look like a shadowy figure out of a nightmare. He signaled us with a terse wave, indicating we should stay low. The night was alive with the sounds of distant firefights, the occasional explosion punctuating the air.

Lot took position near the edge of the roof, taking his rifle, which he had slung over his shoulder, and scanned the environment.

“Where the hell are we?”

I put the binoculars to my eyes, looking for anything recognizable that could serve as a landmark. I saw what remained of Azrieli Sarona Tower, which we were briefed about before the operation. Sgt. Hess had given me another map. I unfolded it, tracing our route with my finger until I found our current location. Using the compass, I aligned the map with the north. The Azrieli Sarona Tower was marked, its distinctive height making it a useful reference point.

“We’re here,” I said, pointing to a spot on the map. “Between these two ruined buildings. I can see the tower,” I added, pointing towards the faint silhouette against the night sky. “It’s about one click away, according to the map scale.”

Lot nodded, peering through his rifle scope to get a better view. “Looks right. Maybe a bit less,” he added, using his experience to refine the estimate. “Should take us about half an hour to reach the center of the city if we move carefully. Let’s go downstairs and let everybody know.”

“Wait,” Raskin said, his sixth sense kicking in. “Do you hear any artillery or airstrikes?”

“Nothing, it’s almost eerie for a battlefield of 20 million soldiers.”

Raskin walked to the opposite side of the building and laid down prone with binoculars against his eyes, looking far into the distance towards the outskirts of the city. He could see a long column of tanks and trucks carrying soldiers moving outside of the city.

“Lot, come here! Check this out!”

Lot got up and quickly ran over, eyes wide with alarm. "Look at this, what do you think is going on?"

"The bastards are leaving; they’re abandoning the city. They’re insane, but why the fuck would they leave? We outnumber the kikes 20 to 1. Taking the city is essential to capturing Israel. Unless... they’re going to nuke the son of a bitch.”

Lot’s eyes widened. “But we’re inside.”

Raskin’s voice dropped to a grim whisper. “Look at our honky asses. We're white, we're expendable."

"We need to get out of here and join up with the others," Lot said, his voice shaky but resolute.

"One thing's for sure: we're probably surrounded by now. With the rest of our forces pulling out and comms down, there's no way they could've notified us."

"We need to notify Sarge fast. Let's go, Lot."

They both got up and rushed to the service door. Raskin took hold of the handle, and at the same time, an opposing force pushed the door open, knocking them both back. Three IDF soldiers burst through the doorway. Pvt. Lot reacted instantly, firing his shotgun. The first soldier's body absorbed most of the buckshot, his face filled with shock and horror. The second soldier used his comrade's body as a shield, pulling out his sidearm and shooting Lot. Lot, with a final effort, pulled the trigger again, the second blast of buckshot tearing through the already wounded first soldier and gravely injuring the second.

Raskin’s heart pounded as he scrambled to his feet. The third IDF soldier raised his rifle, but Raskin was quicker. He lunged forward, grabbing the barrel of the rifle and wrestling it away. The two struggled, the IDF soldier's strength nearly overpowering him. But Raskin, fueled by adrenaline and desperation, managed to twist the rifle free and deliver a sharp blow to the soldier's head with the butt of the gun.

The soldier crumpled to the ground, unconscious or worse. Raskin didn’t wait to check. He turned to Lot, who was bleeding profusely from his side. The grim reality of their situation hit him hard. They were outnumbered, outgunned, and isolated.

"Hang in there, Lot," Raskin said, his voice strained. "We need to move."

Lot gritted his teeth against the pain, nodding weakly. Suddenly, Lot's eyes widened as he looked past Raskin. "Raskin!" Lot shouted, pointing frantically at the oncoming soldier.

Raskin spun around, barely having a second to react. The soldier was lunging at him with a knife, his face a mask of determination. Instinct kicked in. Raskin sidestepped his thrust, grabbing his wrist with one hand while using the other to grip his shoulder. With a swift, fluid motion, he leveraged the soldier's momentum against him, throwing him over his shoulder. The soldier hit the ground hard, the knife clattering from his hand as the impact knocked the wind out of him.

Without hesitation, Raskin kicked the knife away and pinned the soldier down, pressing his knee into his chest. The soldier struggled, his eyes wide with fear and desperation, but Raskin held firm. He drew his sidearm, aiming it squarely at his face.

"Shalom, stand down," Raskin warned, his voice low and deadly. The soldier stopped struggling, his eyes still filled with defiance but tempered by the realization of his defeat. Raskin slowly removed his knee from his chest and backed away from him.

Raskin glanced back at Lot, who was clutching his wound, his face pale but determined. They couldn't afford any more delays. The situation was growing more precarious by the second, and they needed to regroup with Sgt. Hess and the rest of their squad before it was too late.

Raskin looked down at the subdued soldier, then pointed at the sky and said, “Boom. Nuke. You, me, safety. Tunnel.”

Keeping one hand on his sidearm, Raskin quickly fumbled through his rear pack with the other, pulling out a map. "Safety, tunnel," he repeated, slowly lowering his sidearm. "Live."

The soldier muttered something in Hebrew that Raskin couldn't understand.

"No understand," Raskin replied, shaking his head.

He pointed at Lot, who was struggling to breathe. Raskin knew he needed to treat Lot fast or he was going to die. With the map and pen in hand, he moved closer to the soldier.

"Mark, safety, you go," Raskin said, pointing at the map and then towards the door.

"I understand and live," said the soldier.

The soldier hesitated, then said something in Hebrew, as if trying to give directions. He made a mark on the map and pointed along the street they were supposed to go. He took Raskin’s binoculars and moved to the edge of the building. Looking forward, he found his destination and shared the binoculars with Raskin, showing him where they had to go.

Raskin nodded, understanding the soldier's directions. He pointed at the door, “Go!”

The soldier quickly turned around and began running towards the door, glancing at his deceased comrades. Upon reaching the door, his body jolted as the weight of 5.56 rounds pierced his body from a SAW, a monster with a machine-like roar tearing away his flesh and humanity until he was a husk of mutton lying on the ground.

Sgt. Hess appeared from the shadow of the doorway, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. “Leave some kikes for us. I didn’t send you fuckers up here to have all the fun without us.”

A surge of anger coursed through Raskin’s body. His grip tightened around his pistol. He was about ready to pull his sidearm and shoot Sgt. Hess in the head when Lieut. Daniels also appeared.

“What happened here, gentlemen? We heard the gunshots and started running,” he saw Private Lot, “Oh shit.”

Raskin took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm. “Sir, we encountered resistance. Lot's been hit. We need to get him out of here and back to a medic.”

Daniels nodded, his face hardening as he assessed the situation. “Alright, we need to move fast. Hess, help Raskin with Lot. We need a medevac, but the comms, the comms…”

Hess approached, his earlier bravado replaced with a grim determination. Together, he and Raskin lifted Lot and placed him on a tarp they had stretched out on the ground. Lot groaned in pain but managed to keep his grip on his precious shotgun, murmuring the rosary.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus," Lot whispered, his voice shaky but determined. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death…..."

Raskin listened to the familiar words, feeling a pang of sorrow as he watched his comrade in pain. "Hang in there, Lot," he said, trying to reassure him. Raskin thought of the old saying, “There are no atheists in a foxhole,” and this saying was even more apparent as he heard Lot speak of God, of whom he never heard Lot speak of before.

As he was carrying private Lot towards the service door, he looked at Lieut. Daniels, almost forgetting the most important thing in the urgency of saving Lot, but now suddenly remembering it, “And there’s one more thing, Lieutenant,” said Raskin, the stress and panic building in his mind and voice to unbearable levels.

The lieutenant looked at Raskin incredulously.

“They’re going to nuke us; I swear to God they’re going to nuke us. They’re all pulling out. I saw convoys moving east back toward the landing zone. We’re surrounded, we’re all going to die if we don’t move to the tunnels.”

“Where are we right now?”

Raskin pointed at the map.

“We’re here. So, we’re about 1 km from the beach. We’re carrying wounded. I don’t know the possibility of running for it.”

Lieutenant Daniels started examining the map. He started marking the map with a pen he pulled out of his pocket.

“So, the first and second are supposed to be here. And behind us is the fourth with their integration of coalition elements. So, there is a very good chance that if the fourth coloured battalion pulled back the IDF would definitely counter attack using their tunnels to quickly surround us. The first, second, and third comprise of about one hundred thousand soldiers.”

He choked back tears as the reality of the situation hit him.

“Maybe we could link up with soldiers from our battalion and get a transport,” said Sgt. Hess who placed a reassuring hand on Daniels' shoulder. "Regardless sir, we need to move now if we're going to have any chance."

“I have friends in those units.” Lieutenant Daniels snapped out of it.

“Sir the bomb could come any moment.”

Daniels nodded, steeling himself. "Alright, let's get Lot out of here and find those tunnels. We can't afford to waste any more time. I don’t think we have time to link up with another unit."

They moved swiftly, the weight of their situation pressing down on them. The threat of the impending nuclear strike loomed large, and every second counted. As they navigated the war-torn streets, Raskin couldn't shake the feeling that they were being watched, hunted. He kept thinking of the woman and her daughter getting vaporized into smoke, if only he had time to go back and warn them.

They quickly made their way through the building back to the ground floor, exiting to the street. Every roar of a jet, every explosion hit them with great apprehension, as if each one could be the final blow. Raskin kept looking up at the sky, his heart pounding in his chest. He had faced death countless times, but this was different. This felt like the endgame, the moment when all their sacrifices and struggles would culminate in either salvation or annihilation.

They ran as fast as they could and reached the location marked on the map that indicated the tunnel. They began searching the burnt-out building frantically, every room a potential door to their salvation. As each room led to nothing, their hope grew dimmer, as if they were crawling and sifting through darkness.

“You’re fucking kike lied to you. Now we’re going to die,” spat one soldier, his voice filled with bitterness.

“Maybe they’re not going to nuke us,” another replied, though his voice lacked conviction.

“If you wouldn’t have shot him, we could have taken him with us,” Raskin said defensively, though he had no intention of doing so.

“Maybe it’s all a ploy to lure the kike rats out of hiding,” came another cynical voice.

“There’s nothing here, absolutely nothing,” one soldier said, his despair echoing through the empty building.

Lieut. Daniels glanced back at the map, the hastily drawn escape route now seeming like a cruel joke. The tunnels, their supposed sanctuary, were nowhere to be found. Time had run out. Despair threatened to overwhelm them, but the lieutenant forced it out of his mind, clinging to a fragile thread of hope.

“The last thing I’m going to do before I die is kick your ass, Raskin,” shouted Sgt. Hess as he ran toward Raskin. Raskin, confused and shocked, with nowhere to go, accepted his fate and allowed Sgt. Hess’s momentum to carry him to the ground. They began grappling, throwing punches back and forth. Other soldiers joined the pile, trying to break up the fight, but instead, old hatreds were brought forth, and a large brawl ensued among them all. Lieut. Daniels tried to break it up and got hit instead.

The chaotic melee upon the frail wooden frame of the dilapidated, war-torn building caused it to groan and creak until the floor collapsed, bringing all seven of them down with it, including Pvt. Lot, whose injuries were only aggravated by the fall. Amidst the rubble and confusion, Lot clung to his shotgun, still murmuring the rosary. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," he whispered, his voice barely audible over the chaos.

As they lay there in the debris, the realization of their situation settled in. Raskin felt a wave of despair wash over him but quickly pushed it aside. "We need to get out of here," he said, his voice firm. "We're not done yet."

Hess, his earlier rage dissipated by the fall, nodded. "Let's move," he said, helping Raskin to his feet. Together, they began to lift Lot again, determined to find a way out of their predicament.

Just as they were about to give up hope, Raskin noticed a faint draft of cool air coming from a corner of the basement. "Over here," he called out, his voice filled with renewed hope. They moved a pile of debris, revealing a hidden trapdoor.

Lieut. Daniels forced it open, revealing a dark tunnel below. "This is it," he said, a mixture of relief and urgency in his voice. "This is our way out."

They carefully lowered Lot into the tunnel first, his murmured prayers echoing in the confined space. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," he continued, his voice a steady rhythm amidst the chaos.

One by one, the squad descended into the tunnel. The cool, damp air was a stark contrast to the burning, smoke-filled ruins above. The tunnel stretched out before them, a narrow passageway that promised a glimmer of hope.

Just as the last soldier entered the tunnel, a blinding flash lit up the sky, followed by a deafening roar. The ground shook violently, and the intense pressure caused debris to rain down at the tunnel entrance. "Move, move!" Raskin shouted, the urgency in his voice propelling them forward.

The shockwave from the nuclear explosion sent a wave of heat and pressure surging toward them. They moved as fast as they could, their NBC gear protecting them from the immediate radiation and heat. The tunnel shuddered, dust and small rocks falling from the ceiling blocking the entrance. They managed to stay ahead, driven by sheer survival instinct. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, they reached a reinforced section of the tunnel, the walls cool and solid.

They collapsed against the walls, gasping for breath. The roar of the explosion faded, leaving an eerie silence in its wake. They had made it, but the cost had been high. The collapsed tunnel had saved them from the immediate destruction, but the world above had changed forever.

Raskin looked around at his comrades, their faces etched with exhaustion and relief. "We made it," he said, his voice barely a whisper. "We’re still alive." He looked down at Pvt. Lot.

“Lot, you still with us?”

“Of course I am. It’ll take more than a nuclear blast to kill Pvt. Lot. But I’m hurting, I need help.”

Lieut. Daniels examined Lot’s wound. “I think it’s a flesh wound, clean exit. The bandage should keep him stable,” he observed, turning on his flashlight and looking down the tunnel, the beam piercing the darkness. “But it’s imperative we treat his wound as soon as possible to avoid infection.”

Raskin and Hess picked up Lot, supporting him between them. The squad moved with renewed determination; their earlier conflicts forgotten in the face of their shared goal. In the darkness, they had found their salvation—a hidden escape that promised a chance at survival.