# 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 world-wide global 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.

# Chapter 1

In 2034, humanity had shattered the limits of possibility, emerging from the flames of nuclear war like a vengeful phoenix. Purged of its former flaws, it forged a new world in its own image, celebrating this rebirth with the 'Year of Pride,' a time when humility became the greatest sin.

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.

The Obama's transformation was planned to be revealed at the Pride Dome, the largest stadium in America, now the epicentre of the nation’s new identity. The anticipation surrounding this announcement eclipsed even the most celebrated Super Bowl in history. The wealthiest and most powerful families and celebrities descended upon the ruins of New York City, like vultures circling in on their latest prey to queerology.

The Pride Dome was a marvel of modern architecture, a colossal structure that stood like a diamond amidst the skeletal remnants of skyscrapers ravaged by nuclear fallout. Its design was a testament to humanity’s newfound obsession with identity. The dome itself was a massive, iridescent sphere, its surface shimmering with every color of the rainbow, reflecting the sunlight during the day and glowing with an ethereal light at night. The outer shell of the Pride Dome was composed of a highly advanced material that could shift colors and patterns at will, a living canvas that displayed the ever-changing symbols and emblems of pride.

Once inside the protective layer shielding them from nuclear radiation, attendees approached the Pride Dome, where they were greeted by two towering pillars. Each pillar was intricately carved, depicting the history of Pride in detailed reliefs. Atop these pillars stood enormousstatues of the Greek gods Hermaphroditus and Aphrodite, their forms exuding a powerful presence. These statues served as bulwarks, standing watch over the entrance and symbolizing the defense of sexualfreedom against those who would seek to destroy it.

Raskin, a bright-eyed corporal, stoic, young, and solid, had been detached from his company to be part of the security for the opening celebration of the Year of Pride. He stood with the Greek gods taking selfies to send to his father and sister back home in Indiana. One selfie he took looked as if Aphrodite was actually standing beside him by the shift in distance of his closeness to the camera and Aphrodite’s distance from the lens.

"Look where I am, Dad! You wouldn’t believe it." He typed quickly, sending the selfie. The statue of Aphrodite loomed behind him, almost lifelike, her cold gaze contrasting with his awkward smile. He wondered what his father would think—if he'd see the humor in it, or just shake his head at how far his son had come from the quiet fields of Indiana.”

At the entrance to the Pride Dome, attendees were scanned by the QueerDar—a device so advanced it could detect even the subtlest deviations from an individual's chosen gender identity. It could sense gay thoughts in straight men, straight thoughts in gay men, trans thoughts in binary women, and so on. If the QueerDar detected any inconsistency, the individual was immediately flagged for gender reassignment therapy.

The therapy was brutal. For those whose thoughts betrayed their gender, Therapy Hub—formerly known as Pornhub—became a tool of re-education. The once-taboo content of the old world had been repurposed into "Therapy," designed to rewire the minds of those who deviated from their prescribed identities. For some, this meant hours of gay porn; for others, trans porn, straight porn, or whatever else was necessary to enforce the new norm. The QueerDar had become so precise that it could detect the thoughts of children in the womb. In some cases, gender reassignment therapy was performed even before birth. Doctors had perfected a method to stream Therapy Hub directly into the womb, projecting holographic screens to ensure the unborn child received the necessary indoctrination.

If Therapy Hub failed to cure an individual of genderdeception, one of the greatest sins of queerology, they were mandated to undergo gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatment. During this procedure, their genitalia were altered to align with their internal thoughts and feelings. Many individuals underwent multiple gender reassignment surgeries, unable to control the conflicting desires of their heart.

Raskin's anxiety mounted as he approached the QueerDar, the tension in his chest growing with each step. The machine stood ominously ahead, a cold and unyielding sentinel of the new order. He tried to maintain a calm exterior, but inside, his thoughts raced. What if the machine found something? Some hidden inclination or fleeting thought he hadn’t even realized he had?

To prepare himself, he had a routine—one he believed would keep him safe. Before each scan, Raskin would find a secluded place to masturbate, focusing on the emptiness of space, trying to purge any trace of desire from his mind. He believed that by emptying his body, he could clear his thoughts, leaving nothing for the QueerDar to detect.

But now, standing in line with hundreds of others, the pressure weighed heavily on him. He couldn’t shake the fear that this time, the machine might see through his defences. The QueerDar didn’t just scan your body; it scanned your mind, your thoughts, your very essence. And if it found anything that didn’t align with the strict sexual norms of the Year of Pride, there would be consequences.

Raskin stood frozen as the QueerDar began its scan, its cold, mechanical eye dissecting his every thought and impulse. The silence was unbearable, broken only by the faint hum of the machine. He felt exposed, vulnerable, as if every secret he’d ever buried was being dragged to the surface. The seconds stretched on, each one an eternity.

Then, with a sharp, metallic clang, the scan was complete. The sound reverberated through the chamber, signalling the end of the process. But there was no relief in that noise—only dread. Because in this world, you never knew your fate immediately. There was no flashing light, no audible alarm to indicate if you’d been flagged for gender reassignment therapy. You simply went about your life, pretending everything was normal.

But deep down, everyone knew the truth. If the QueerDar found something, anything, that didn’t fit, you would find out soon enough. ANTIFA would show up at your door in the dead of night, their black-clad figures slipping through the darkness like shadows. There would be no explanation, no chance to plead your case. One moment you were there, and the next, you disappeared—taken for "Therapy" and never seen again.

Inside the Pride Dome was a vast amphitheater, capable of holding hundreds of thousands of spectators. The seating was arranged in large circles, descending toward the central stage, a platform suspended in mid-air, seemingly defying gravity. Above the stage hung a gigantic holographic orb that continuously displayed a montage of Pride celebrations from around the world.

The dome’s ceiling was a gigantic screen that could project anything from a starry night sky to a kaleidoscope of swirling colors and abstract shapes, all synchronized to the music and events happening below. The acoustics were designed to ensure that every word spoken and every note played resonated throughout the entire structure.

Surrounding the main arena were multiple levels of galleries, each dedicated to different aspects of Pride culture. These galleries were filled with interactive exhibits, virtual sex experiences, and nude art installations that explored the evolution of gender, sexuality, and identity. Live performers, strategically placed throughout the galleries, engaged in explicit sexual acts, showcasing the fluidity and freedom of sexual expression that had become a cornerstone of the Year of Pride.

Raskin walked so fast he almost sprinted by the explicit sexual acts on display. He knew by indulging in these explicit scenes he might throw a wrench in his process of beating the QueerDar. He might like what he saw, maybe there was a reason to be a woman and enjoy the gracefulness and beauty they have.

As the rank and file of attendees, some dressed in the most lavish drag with long flowing dresses that trailed meters behind them, passed through the QueerDar, they were directed to their seats. In keeping with the Reformation's strict segregation policies, people of whiteness and people of color were no longer allowed to sit side by side.

Raskin stood at his post, trying to process the surreal scene before him. The white section, reserved for the wealthy and powerful, was a world away from the small, rural Indiana town he had known. Here, extravagance and opulence were on full display, with drag babies—infants dressed in flamboyant costumes—carried by attendants like prized possessions. It was a stark contrast to the more subdued enforcement of queerology back home, where regulations were followed but not with the same zeal.

In Indiana, the QueerDar was something he only encountered at the grocery store, a minor inconvenience compared to the pervasive surveillance in the city. The military had offered a strange kind of freedom, where the strict rules of queerology seemed to loosen, allowing him to navigate the world with fewer constraints. Yet here he was, enforcing a system that had spared him its full weight, watching as the privileged paraded their compliance in ways that felt alien to him.

As Raskin scanned the crowd, his mind wandered back to his hometown. The people there had accepted queerology out of necessity or face reformation, but there was always a sense of quiet resistance, a reluctance to fully embrace the new norms. Now, surrounded by the most extreme displays of that ideology, Raskin felt the weight of the double standard pressing down on him. The military had shielded him from the harsher aspects of queerology, but now he was part of the machinery that enforced it.

The lights dimmed, and the crowd fell silent in anticipation. The booming voice continued from the darkness, reverberating throughout the Pride Dome.

"They are the saviors of America who gave us the Reformation and taught us queerology. Before them, this nation was lost in darkness, but they returned and brought light to the blind, awakening the citizens of America to the truth. They set the alarm and forced everyone out of bed, ushering in a new dawn of enlightenment and pride. I am honored to present the President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the First Lady, Michelle Obama."

As the voice finished, the center of the stage began to open, revealing two rising platforms. On them stood Barack and Michelle Obama, their presence commanding the attention of the massive crowd. They waved to the audience; their faces illuminated by the glowing lights of the Pride Dome. The image of the Queer Union Jack, a fusion of the LGBT and American flags, unfurled across the dome's walls, a symbol of the new order.

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. Michelle, on the other hand, remained somewhat strong and muscular, using whatever means necessary from the hands of modern science to maintain and sustain her youthful vigor. She now towered over Barack, like a looming giant ready to devour him at any moment.

The crowd erupted into applause and cheers as the First Couple stood before them, embodying the transformation of America. The room filled with a sense of unity and purpose, as the crowd prepared for what would come next.

Then, the voice returned, leading the audience in a new pledge of allegiance, a pledge to this reformed nation and its values:

"I pledge allegiance to the Queer Union Jack, and to the diversity and pride for which it stands. One nation, awakened and enlightened, indivisible in its love and liberty, with pride and justice for all."

The words echoed through the Pride Dome, the crowd reciting in unison, voices strong and unwavering.

Raskin forced himself to move his lips in time with the replacement Pledge of Allegiance, though every fiber of his being recoiled from the words. The original pledge, with its simplicity and dignity, was a distant memory, replaced by this twisted parody. But in a world where dissent was lethal, he played the part, hiding his revulsion behind a mask of conformity. Yet deep inside, a gnawing dread consumed him.

The crowd became silent as they expected Barack to begin speaking. Barack’s speech began more as a conversation with Michelle.

Barack gently reached out, taking Michelle’s hand in his. "You’ve come so far, and I’m incredibly proud of you," he said, his voice rich with emotion. Whether the sentiment was genuine or not, Raskin couldn’t tell, but the crowd was captivated, hanging on every word.

The stadium buzzed with anticipation; the energy palpable. Rumors had been swirling for weeks that a major announcement was coming, and now, it seemed, the moment had arrived.

“Thank you, Barack,” Michelle began, her voice trembling with barely contained emotion. “It’s been an agonizing journey to fully accept who I am. But with your unwavering support, I found the strength to embrace my truth. Without you, I’d still be living a lie.” She turned to the audience, her gaze locking onto them like a predator sizing up its prey. “I owe it to you—every brave soul in this nation. Your courage lit the fire within me, and that’s why I’m making this announcement today.”

The drumroll started, vibrating the very air in the Pride Dome. It wasn’t just loud—it was oppressive, suffocating, as if the sound alone could force submission. Raskin clenched his teeth to keep from flinching, the relentless pounding invading his skull. The anticipation was unbearable, the entire crowd teetering on the edge of hysteria.

Then Michelle—no, Michael—spoke, and the world seemed to tilt. “From now on, you shall know me as Michael! I am a man!”

The stadium erupted, but Michael wasn’t done. With a savage grin, he tore off his wig and flung it into the frenzied crowd, who clawed at each other to catch the piece of fabric like it was a holy relic. Then, in one brutal motion, he ripped off his pantsuit, exposing a bulge so pronounced it seemed almost grotesque beneath the tight latex thong. Gasps of shock and awe rippled through the masses as they witnessed the transformation in its raw, unfiltered reality.

“I have a BBC! A big black correction!” Michael roared, his voice slicing through the chaos like a knife.

The crowd didn’t just cheer—they howled, a cacophony of primal screams that echoed off the dome’s walls. Holographic fireworks exploded overhead; their dazzling colors nearly lost in the madness below. The speakers blasted “It’s Raining Men,” but the anthem was almost drowned out by the sheer volume of the celebration. People were jumping, crying, fainting—some overcome with ecstasy, others with sheer disbelief.

Raskin stood rooted to the spot, his mind reeling. The scene before him was beyond surreal—it was nightmarish, a grotesque carnival of excess that defied all reason. The Pride Dome had become a swirling vortex of euphoria and insanity, and at its center stood Michael, triumphant and untouchable.

And then, just when Raskin thought the night couldn’t spiral any further into madness, Barack stepped forward. The former president, his face a mask of serene confidence, let the silence stretch—just long enough for the tension to reach a breaking point.

“I’m gay!” Barack shouted, his voice carrying over the delirious crowd.

For a moment, the entire Pride Dome seemed to freeze, the air thick with disbelief. Then, like a dam bursting, the crowd exploded into a frenzy so wild it threatened to tear the Dome apart. People screamed themselves hoarse, their bodies convulsing with unrestrained emotion. Some began to tear at their clothes and other’s clothes, overcome by the revelation, a massive orgy erupted in the stadium. Some fell to the ground, fainting or weeping uncontrollably. The air was electric, charged with an energy that threatened to consume them all.

Raskin could barely breathe, the atmosphere thick with hysteria. He gripped his pistol afraid that somehow this hysteria might extend its consuming power to him and he would be devoured by it. The spectacle, the revelations, the raw power of the crowd—it was all too much. He felt as if he were drowning in it, unable to escape the madness that now ruled the world.

# Chapter 2

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. Michael sat with his head resting on Barack’s lap in their cozy living room in the private residence of the White House. They were both exhausted after such a whirlwind reception in the Dome of Pride. Never in their wildest dreams they could imagine all they had accomplished such a short time.

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.

"Ya know, you’ve always been a man in my eyes, no matter what anyone else has said," Barack said, gazing deeply into Michael’s eyes. "I’ve always dreamt of this moment where I can feel you fully," he added, his voice full of 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." He sat up excited.

Barack leaned in closer, his voice barely above a whisper. "We’re going to unveil a new initiative in the United Nations that will not only strengthen our control of the world 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. This has always been a goal of yours, but you’ve been quiet about it for some time."

Barack's gaze was steady, his voice calm and resolute. "I’ve never given up on this dream. 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 worldwide identity lead by the UN. 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. We’ll also be fulfilling Mohammed’s command to us so that Allah’s blessings will pour down on us.”

“May the grace of Allah illuminate our path.” Michael quickly followed.”

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 slipped out of bed, careful not to disturb him. It was late at night as he made his way to the Oval Office. The building was silent; all his staff had gone home to be with their families. Only the Secret Service agents dressed in drag were stationed in the hallways, quietly passing their time on duty.

Upon taking power, Barack had all the former president’s portraits removed and replaced with his own. He paused before one of his portraits, reflecting on the accomplishments of the last two years in office. He felt no regret about removing the former presidents' portraits, especially those of Trump and Levi, as they represented an era when the white patriarchy held dominance.

Barack had tirelessly worked behind the scenes for years, dismantling what he saw as an oppressive system, all while striving for a third term. To him, whiteness symbolized a deep societal evil—a legacy of oppression rooted in British colonization. His moment arrived when President Levi, in a misguided attempt to unite a divided nation, naively selected him as vice president, unaware of Barack's true ambitions.

While Levi was preoccupied with World War III, leading the nation on the battlefield, Barack carefully expanded his influence. He attended galas, forged alliances, and even gained the support of Republicans eager to see him in power for a third term. Meanwhile, America was crumbling. New York lay in ruins after a nuclear strike, crops failed due to climate change, and the war with China and Russia dragged on. Domestic unrest simmered, as Levi seemed more concerned with the war than with the suffering at home.

Sensing the nation's disillusionment, Barack and his allies launched a covert campaign to amend the Constitution. They manipulated public opinion through media campaigns, social media, and backroom deals with key political figures. The amendment was framed as a necessary step to ensure stability in a time of crisis. Despite fierce opposition arguing that it threatened the foundations of democracy, the referendum passed by a narrow margin, reflecting the desperation of a war-weary public.

After China’s defeat, Russia sought a ceasefire to regroup. With the temporary lull in fighting, Barack seized his opportunity. He began a campaign to impeach Levi, and with overwhelming support from the American public and Congress, the calls for Levi’s removal grew louder. Protests erupted nationwide, and soon after, Levi was impeached. Despite the uneasy truce with Russia, an election was hurriedly organized to legitimize the government.

Barack's popularity overshadowed his opponents, and the Republican candidate was little more than a formality. Upon winning, Barack quickly moved to consolidate his power. In his first days in office, he launched a campaign to purge the nation of white Christian nationalists, a vocal minority now branded as the embodiment of the oppressive class.

This was the next phase of his plan: dismantling the white patriarchy. He harvested the fruit of years of teaching critical race theory in schools. Critical race theory was a monster whose black tentacles had slowly gained a stranglehold over the hearts of America’s youth. Once it had its stranglehold, it injected its black poison, creating heartless drones, children with eyes glazed over who could only see the color of one’s skin, not the content of one’s character.

The teachings whispered of a world divided, casting humanity into rigid molds of oppressors and oppressed, white privilege and black oppression fueling fires of resentment and hatred. The monster had fed on the innocence of youth, replacing curiosity and compassion with a cold, relentless fury. The seeds of division sprouted thorns of mistrust and animosity, entwining themselves around the very essence of community and kinship.

The campaign of terror started, ironically with the help of white ANTIFA members who had made an unholy alliance with AOC. The reformation, as it was called, was released on the white Christian oppressors like a rabid dog. The twisted irony of their alliance, a mockery of solidarity, only served to deepen the shadows of betrayal and confusion. These allies now turned their fervor towards a grim cause, becoming harbingers of a nightmarish purge.

In a single month, millions of white Americans were killed. The streets flowed with their blood, turning into rivers of sorrow. The cries of the fallen echoed through the night, a haunting symphony of anguish orchestrated by ideological fervor. The ground itself seemed to weep, saturated with the lifeblood of a nation torn apart by a thirst for vengeance..

Allah had finally given justice to the children of slaves and colored immigrants, or so Barack privately believed. Yet this justice was a double-edged sword, cutting deeply into the soul of America. The oppressed, once shackled by the chains of history, now wielded those chains as weapons of retribution. Mercy was cast aside, replaced by a harvest of despair and death.

Fear and hopelessness hung in the air like a thick fog, suffocating any remaining glimmers of hope. Once-vibrant streets had become graveyards of ambition, their silence broken only by the echoes of violence. A generation’s heartbeat drummed to the rhythm of hatred, each pulse a testament to the indoctrination that had seized their minds.

In this shattered landscape, unity was a distant memory, and community a hollow shell. The fabric of society, once woven from diverse threads, had been torn apart by those who sought to create a new order. History was rewritten in blood, each chapter a brutal reminder of the cost of extremism.

As the regime cemented its power, it stood on the foundation of broken bodies and shattered lives. The heart of the nation, once a beacon of freedom and liberty, now lay in ruins, its beat reduced to a hollow throb of disillusionment and despair. The vision of a utopia had become a nightmare, where justice and vengeance blurred into a grotesque dance of death.

He gave a half smile. The final step was done with the support of the AOC and other white democrats. Obama had 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. The world after "The War That Set the World on Fire," was a world of cruelty and chaos, of struggle and survival, brutality, and hope. This hope rested in the heart Hoshea Levi which would completely transform the world, redeeming mankind and restoring the Earth to its better state.

Barack sat in the Oval Office, staring listlessly out the window. He pulled a cigarette packet from his desk. The sweet aroma of tobacco made him crave nicotine like the embrace of Michael. He lit a cigarette for the first time in thirty years and turned on the TV. Scenes of chaos in Tel Aviv played out. Students from the Meretz party marched through the streets, burning Torahs and denouncing Haredi Jews. Riot police shot gas into the crowd. A group of students beat an elderly Orthodox Jew, his face covered in blood. Obama smiled.

In Gaza, Palestinians violently protested with Molotov cocktails, destroying armed vehicles. The Israelis retaliated, slaughtering hundreds of Palestinians. Their mangled corpses were recorded with careful editing to show Israel in the worst possible light. The Palestinians, galvanized by Meretz, prepared for a vote in the Knesset to solidify the two-state solution. The CIA's funding of Meretz 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 protests tearing apart Israel. 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 New York in an underground bunker where United Nations General Assembly was located, 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 now stood before the world, walking 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. 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 Israeli leaders in Jerusalem, 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. 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 3

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 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. He felt relieved to be back from the Dome of Pride. He felt so much more at ease with his fellow soldiers than around the chaos of the ultra-rich. Here on the open seas, there was no looming threat of being scanned by a QueerDar, just the fresh air and the smell the sea that cleared his mind.

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 tranquillity 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 got serious.

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

**"It's all about perspective, Private,"** Sgt. Hess began, his tone matter-of-fact but charged with intensity. "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. And the sheep, Private, are the Palestinian people."

The atmosphere in the berthing area grew heavier, the oppressive air thick with tension. The dim, flickering light overhead seemed to emphasize every word Hess spoke, casting ominous shadows on the walls around them. The room, once filled with casual banter, now felt like the sanctum of some dark ritual.

Sgt. Hess, feeling a surge of inspiration, continued speaking as if possessed by an unseen force. His voice took on the cadence of a preacher delivering a sermon, and the soldiers around him listened with rapt attention. What had started as a simple conversation turned into something much more profound—a religious experience.

"You see, gentlemen, for the first time in history, humanity is united in one cause. Never before have I seen people of all races and nations gathered together like this. This is truly something phenomenal, something that has never happened before. I don't believe in religion. Hell, I don't believe in much of anything—until now. But I believe in humanity and in this sacred mission we've been given: to liberate these forsaken people who have been oppressed by these conniving kikes."

The soldiers, once indifferent or even skeptical, began nodding along, their earlier amusement replaced by a grim determination. Raskin felt a chill run down his spine as he listened. There was a dark power in Hess's words, a conviction that was impossible to ignore. It stirred something deep within Raskin, a sense of ominous foreboding that he hadn't fully grasped until now. He realized that this mission wasn't just about orders or survival—it was about something much bigger, something he couldn't quite make sense of yet.

Lot, found himself drawn in by the sergeant's fervor. The fear he had felt about killing began to dissipate, replaced by a burning sense of righteousness. If Hess, a man who had faced death countless times, believed so strongly in this cause, then who was he to question it?

“You’re right, Sergeant,” Lot muttered, his voice barely above a whisper, but filled with resolve. “They’re not people. We’re slaughtering a predator, they deserve what’s coming to them.”

Sgt. Hess, sensing the mood of the group, shifted his tone. "No problem, killer. You men hit the rack now. We've 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 humanity 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. Sgt. Hess 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 4

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 5

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 catacombs of the Mount of Olives. They are ancient burial sites, a labyrinth of tunnels and chambers that few would dare to enter.”

“And I’m going to help you navigate them? 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-Aqsa 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-Aqsa 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 6

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 spectre. 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. “Armors 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 7**

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 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—I mean reformation.”

“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 8

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.

# Chapter 9

I struggled to sleep on the cold, hard concrete in the vast, open jail barracks. One side was concrete, the other barred from floor to ceiling. The incessant buzz of fans offered some relief from the warm Indian summer night. Bright fluorescent lights pierced my eyelids, making rest impossible. I tossed and turned, swatting away a mosquito that landed on my face. I opened my eyes to see other inmates crammed beside me, all asleep. The conditions here were a far cry from the American prison I had known. This was my first night.

I got up and greeted a patrolling guard outside the barracks. He returned the courtesy, but we couldn't communicate well, as he didn't speak English and my Hindi was limited.

“Namascar,” I said. He smiled, impressed.

"Ap kis desh se hain aur ap jel mein kyun hain?" he asked.

"I’m American. Passport problems," I replied.

Why the fuck am I an American with passport troubles in an Indian prison? Let me give you the short version without having to write another book because that’s what you do in prison. You reflect on your life. You remember your regrets and triumphs all the while wondering if you could have done this or done that to avoid the fucked-up situation that you’re currently wallowing in like a pig in its own shit.

I fled America nine years ago after serving time for taking a stand against the corrupt U.S. government. In India, I met my wife, married her twice, and then we had a fight. She left me, and I was deported back to the USA. Arrested at the border for violating probation, I spent six months in a low-security facility for the criminally insane. After my release, my probation officer assured me I'd be on probation until her retirement.

Dipti, my wife, was having trouble, and I doubted I could bring her to America. We reconciled, and I returned to India, but my old name was blacklisted, and I was denied entry. I flew back just before Christmas, drowning my sorrows in alcohol. An air hostess, moved by my story, gave me free shots.

At the entry gate in Newark, New Jersey, security had some questions for me like, “Why the fuck do you keep trying to return to India?” Not really, but they did take me downstairs and run a background check because I had been arrested there before. I didn’t have enough money for the return flight home and I became scared that my probation officer might find out that I attempted to again flee the country. But a nice lady in the grounds crew could see the desperation on my face, the bloodshot eyes, and the tears that had been pouring from them. She helped me. She booked my ticket home. I think she had to pay for it, but I’m not sure, but I think she did. There’s some really good Americans out there and my G-d there’s some big ass motherfuckers out there. This wasn’t the first time a complete stranger in America had helped me out from the goodness and kindness in their heart. I thanked that woman and told her that God would bless her then boarded my plane home.

Back in the States, I lost my passport and changed my name to Hoshea after a divine instruction in a VA mental institution. Applying for a new passport raised red flags, and I received only a six-month passport.

When I arrived in India, I wore my kippah, asserting my Jewish identity and claiming to be the Meshiach. I flew into an airport where I hoped no one would recognize me, having been denied entry from Delhi before. Nervously, I greeted the customs officer, relieved when she smiled and let me in. To my relief, she smiled and let me into the land of cows and people shitting on the streets.

After two years in America, pondering my marriage, I reunited with my wife. We married for the third time, in court, but I didn’t have time to apply for my PIO card. There’s a mandatory waiting period after marriage, and my passport had expired. The FRRO, the Indian government agency dealing with foreigners, was on my ass.

The U.S. government wouldn’t renew my passport because I was considered an absconder. The Indian government kept insisting I renew my passport, but I couldn’t since I viewed myself as a refugee. I tried to get the UNHCR to certify my refugee status, but they only grant it to oppressed individuals, like Muslim Afghani girls being forced into marriage with goat-fucking sheep farmers.

Years of living as an absconder, refugee, illegal immigrant, revolutionary, and psychotic individual finally took its toll. One day, the Indian police showed up at my door and hauled me off to this cell, packed with murderers, rapists, child molesters, thieves, and all manner of undesirables—the kind of people you'd instinctively avoid on any given day.

And that is the short form of how I ended up sleeping on this cold, hard concrete floor in an Indian prison, so far away from my home in America. All of these experiences were a stepping stone, preparing me for harder and darker floors of the future. I found that hard and dark floor of the future in Marwani Prayer Hall under Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The ancient stones of Marwani Prayer Hall felt hard and cool against my body, but there was one stark contrast between the stones of the Indian prison barrack and the stones of the Dome of The Rock. The stones of the Dome of The Rock were bursting to the seams with history. I shifted my zip tied hand so I could touch the smooth, ancient stones, I imagined Solomon dedicating the temple to God, his voice echoing through the sacred halls. I ran my fingers across the crevices, wishing that now, more than ever, God's glory would return to the earth and specifically to his temple.

I wanted to get up and examine my surroundings, but my fellow IDF soldiers and I were tragically trapped in complete darkness, our legs and hands zip tied. The oppressive silence was broken only by the faint sounds of breathing and the occasional rustling of chains.

My thoughts raced back to Dipti and our life together, and a sickening realization gnawed at me: I had been foolish to go on this mission before ensuring her safety. What fate awaited her without me there to protect her? The thought of what the coalition's men might do to her made my insides churn. I felt myself dying inside, my soul tearing apart from within. Stupid, stupid, stupid me.

Suddenly, a guard lit a cigarette, his face momentarily illuminated by the flickering flame. The brief light cast eerie shadows on the walls, revealing glimpses of the worn, ancient stones. The smell of smoke mixed with the damp, musty air of the underground chamber, creating a sense of timelessness and despair.

In that fleeting moment of light, I saw the faces of my comrades, their expressions mirroring my own sense of desolation and hope. We were all bound by a shared fate, caught in the web of history and conflict. The soldier guarding us stood over me, his location given away by the glowing ember of his cigarette. In the back of my mind, I wondered if this was it. Was this where I was going to die? All the prophecies that Hashem had spoken to me within my soul—were they just symptoms of schizophrenia? A mere figment of imagination produced by a mentally ill war vet?

I could tell the soldier wanted to say something to me. He paused for a moment, perhaps unsure of what to say. Then, he finally spoke.

“Is that you, Hoshea? It’s been a long time. I know you, but you don’t know me. I guess it’s better that way since we have orders to execute you. You saved our unit in the Alaskan campaign.”

“This is how you repay me and my people? With genocide?”

“Don’t take it personal, Hoshea. We’re just following orders.”

Another soldier lit his cigarette. Two embers now glowed in the darkness. The other soldier chimed in.

“You’re a soldier too, Hoshea. You know how it is. We have families. If we don’t kill you, their lives will be in danger. We’ll be in danger too. I want to see my family again, you understand?”

“Nazi guards said the same thing about the atrocities they committed during the Holocaust. They claimed they were just following orders, protecting their families, doing what they had to do to survive. But that didn’t absolve them of the horrors they inflicted, the lives they destroyed. It’s easy to hide behind orders, to convince yourself you have no choice, but deep down, you know better. You always have a choice."

The soldiers shifted uncomfortably, their expressions hardening again behind the glow of their cigarettes. I continued, my voice steady despite the fear gnawing at my insides.

“We’re all trapped in this cycle, but it doesn’t have to define us. You say you’re protecting your family, but at what cost? You’re creating a world where their safety is built on the suffering of others. Is that really what you want for them? Is that the legacy you want to leave? Remember this, God will judge you.”

The soldier’s cigarette ember glowed brighter as he took a deep drag. The brief illumination revealed a flicker of doubt in his eyes before he exhaled and turned away.”

“Hey man don’t talk to this guy. He’ll get in your head. We’re just waiting for orders. No matter what he says he’s going to die. We’re going to execute him Delta Force Style.”

“So, the executioners coming?”

“He’s on his way now.”

“He’s gonna peel this man like a potato. He can make the hardest soldier squeamish while watching his methods. I feel sorry for this guy.”

I wanted to call out and see if Gabor was still alive, but I didn’t want to put his life in danger in case he was. Who knows the cruel methods they had in store for him. I couldn’t believe their attempt to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque had ended in such a disaster. It was almost as if they were waiting for us.

Hoshea began thinking about their mission from start to finish, trying to pinpoint where they had gone wrong. He started from when they left their fortified compound. They had meticulously planned every detail, but someone must have betrayed them. It was the only explanation for how prepared the enemy had been.

The traitor had given away their position. The ambush, the overwhelming force, the brutal efficiency of their enemy—it all pointed to an inside job. Hoshea's mind raced, replaying every moment, every interaction. The realization hit him like a punch to the gut. Maybe they promised the traitor refuge after the invasion, safety for him and his family. Hoshea knew very well there was a bounty out for his head after he opposed the purge. Had I put the entire mission in jeopardy by volunteering? Where was Gabor?

I couldn't take it anymore. I had to find out what happened with Gabor. I shouted his name.

"Hey, shut your fucking mouth! We'll start torturing you now if you don't shut up," one of the guards barked. The glowing cigarette came dangerously close to my face.

He flicked his ashes on me. The embers slightly burned when they landed on my skin before bouncing off to the ground. The cigarette's glow faded into the darkness, joining the other ember floating in the oppressive gloom.

I couldn’t take it anymore. I had to find out what happened with Gabor. I shouted his name.

“Hey, shut your fucking mouth! We’ll start torturing you now if you don’t shut up.” The glowing cigarette getting awfully close to me. He flicked his ashes on me. It slightly burnt when it landed on my face and bounced off to the ground. The cigarette embers floated away to join the other cigarette floating in the sky.

I felt a body crawl close to me and begin whispering.

“Gabor escaped during the fight when we engaged the Spetsnaz on the Temple Mount.”

That was one hell of a firefight. We had slowly and methodically made our way to the Temple Mount. Gabor confidently took point, a courage and fire in him I’d never seen before. It was as if he was a new man. I think he’d decided that he would make up for the sins of his past by doing the right things in the present. The soldier taking point was always at the most risk and very rarely survived more than seven seconds after the firefight had started.

We moved under the cover of darkness, shadows blending into the ancient stones of the city. Gabor led the way, his movements purposeful, each step calculated. The tension was palpable, every nerve on edge, as we advanced toward our objective.

The enemy had chosen their ambush site well. They positioned themselves where the pathway narrowed, limiting our movement and visibility. We were funnelled into a choke point, making us easy targets. Ambushers hid behind stone walls and in nearby structures, remaining unseen until the last moment. They had also set traps, placing tripwires connected to small explosive charges at the entrance and exit of the pathway to slow us down and create panic.

As we approached the Temple Mount, the ambush hit us with full force. A hidden lookout must have signalled the ambushers as we entered the narrow pathway. Gabor somehow managed to overstep the tripwires that were waiting for us. The soldier behind him exploded in a ball of smoke, his torso landing beside me.

The Spetsnaz were waiting, their precision and coordination deadly. The air filled with the deafening roar of gunfire and the sharp crack of bullets hitting stone. Our way of escape was cut off by the enemy to our rear. I could hear them shouting orders in American English. These were crack soldiers, Delta Force operatives supported by advanced gear, including HKRs that had somehow made their way into the city after their initial assault had failed.

Gabor was the first to return fire, his rifle blazing, but the onslaught was overwhelming. He fought like a man possessed, his actions almost superhuman. I saw him take out several enemies, his face set in grim determination. But then, he vanished in the chaos.

Explosions shook the ground, and I lost sight of him. We were scattered, trying to find cover, trying to survive. The rest of us were pinned down, unable to organize a counterattack. The ambushers maintained suppressive fire from multiple angles, using automatic weapons and grenades to create maximum chaos. Many of us were scattered and isolated. Others broke into homes to return fire as much as they could, but it was to no avail. We were completely surrounded.

Eventually, the deafening roar of enemy fire became silent. All I could hear was the stillness of the night as I scan the environment with my NVGs. Almost half of the soldiers I came with were KIA. The enemy opened up communications with a megaphone, ordering us to surrender or face complete annihilation. Captain Cohen, the officer leading the assault, was ready to fight to the death. He was ready to take a potshot in the direction of the megaphone, but I stopped him. Something inside of me compelled me to convince him to choose a different course of action.

“Captain, let’s surrender. I think we’ll be all right. We’re going to survive this. I think fighting to the death would only waste the lives of these young men fighting courageously here. We’re going to win. We’re going to destroy this mosque. Captain, tell your men to stand down.”

“You know, they don’t take prisoners. We heard reports of the fighting in Tel Aviv, and we’ve been ordered not to surrender. It seems their military brass considers any IDF soldier alive a future threat to the stability of their new world order post-Israel Middle East.”

The voice with a Russian accent behind the megaphone shouted, “You have five minutes to make a decision or we begin opening fire.”

I stood up with my hands in the air. I could hear Captain Cohen ordering me to stand down, but sometimes you have to go on your gut and intuition, not by your own understanding.

“This is former president Hoshea Levi. If I surrender, will you allow these men to live?”

All I could think about was finding the man who had betrayed us. A moment of silence passed where I could almost hear the stomachs of the soldiers with me tied in knots.

The wall providing me cover was partially destroyed and I slowly walked through the gap like a mouse exiting a mouse hole. One by one, other soldiers emerged from their hiding places with their hands up. Our hands were quickly zip-tied.

But before they could cover my head, I saw the face of the traitor who had hidden while the fighting was taking place. He wasn’t disarmed and joined the ranks of the Delta Force and Spetsnaz operators surrounding us. It suddenly hit me. I thought back to the faces in the unit, searching for any sign of deceit. There had been one soldier, always quiet, always in the background. I remembered catching him on a private call right before they embarked on their mission, a call that had raised my suspicion at the time. Now, it seemed all too clear.

“You’re going to die you fucking traitor,” I shouted. The traitor glanced at me. I saw for a moment pure evil in those eyes. My goggles were removed and a black cover was placed over my head. Everything went black.

As we were led away, the harsh reality of our capture began to settle in, a heavy weight pressing down on my chest. The sting of betrayal cut deep, fresh and raw.

Overconfidence had clouded my judgment. I had put too much faith in the belief that God would lead us to an easy victory, that our quest to destroy the mosque was righteous and destined for success. Now, doubt crept in, its insidious tendrils wrapping around my heart. Why was God allowing this to happen? Had my faith transformed into spiritual arrogance, blinding me to the reality of our situation?

After all these years of trusting Him, it felt as though He had betrayed me, handing me over to those who would gloat over my defeat and mock my faith. The betrayal cut deeper than any physical wound, and I wrestled with a torrent of conflicting emotions. Was this some form of divine punishment, a test of my faith, or simply the cruel randomness of the world?

In that moment of despair, I felt utterly abandoned. The God I had so fervently believed in seemed distant, indifferent to my suffering. The weight of my failure crushed me, and I struggled to find a reason to hold on to the faith that had once been my guiding light.

The darkness of the hood over my head mirrored the bleakness of my thoughts. Each step we took seemed to carry us deeper into despair. My mind wandered to the possible fates awaiting us. The fear of the unknown gnawed at my resolve, but somewhere, somehow, a still small voice spoke to me from the deep recesses of my soul, telling me that I was going make it out alive, so I clung to a sliver of hope that our salvation was somewhere near and that actually we were growing closer to our goal.

One hour felt like days as we were marched through the labyrinthine, the air grew colder and damper, and the sound of our footsteps echoed ominously. Finally, the hoods were yanked off and I arrived on the cold, barren floor of the Marwani Prayer Hall under Al-Aqsa Mosque with the floating cigarette embers dancing in the air threatening my every moment with demise.

I lay on the cold, hard concrete beside Captain Cohen, feeling every uncomfortable ridge and crack beneath me. The jail barracks were dimly lit, and the oppressive heat made the air feel thick and suffocating. The buzz of the fans did little to alleviate the warmth of the Indian summer night.

“If Gabor is still out there, there’s hope,” I whispered, my voice barely audible. I was almost trying to use telepathy to communicate with Captain Cohen, hoping that our words wouldn't carry to our captors.

“Gabor is a great soldier. He hasn’t given up the fight. I can guarantee that right now he’s scoping the area, planning our escape,” Captain Cohen replied, his tone firm and reassuring.

“You have family, Captain? A wife and kids?” I asked, trying to distract my mind from our dire situation. Warily, I watched the cigarette embers glowing in the dark.

“No. I gave my life to the IDF. These soldiers are my children, and my wife is the IDF. You?”

“I have a wife, but I never found time to have children. I was always at war, in prison, or being threatened with prison. Financially, I was always struggling,” I paused and looked at the embers again, their glow casting eerie shadows. I could hear the guards’ voices discussing the proper way to operate an HKR. The realization struck me like a bolt of lightning – one of them could be watching us right now.

“Hey Captain? Is there an HKR down here?”

“Yes, in the corner. I saw it when they lit their cigarettes.”

Fear crept into my heart, a cold, unyielding grip that tightened with each passing second. How was Gabor going to rescue us now? The situation seemed hopeless. Those machines were merciless in close quarters combat, programmed with ruthless precision. The robot, standing ominously in the dimly lit corner, had an inbuilt shotgun. Its sensors scanned the room methodically, ready to unleash deadly force at a moment’s notice. My breath hitched, and I felt cold sweat trickle down my back as the weight of our predicament intensified.

“Hmm… Struggling, huh? I think I remember reading some of your biography. Horrible, the things you had to go through,” Captain Cohen said, his voice thoughtful.

“If you want to be a good leader, one must go through the fire of tribulation,” I replied, my mind half-focused on our conversation, the other half on our captors’ increasingly lively chatter.

Desperation gnawed at me. What were they going to do with us? If they were going to kill us, why not just do it already? What was the point of keeping us locked down here? I was ready to patronize our captors when a door opened upstairs and shut with a loud thud. A beam of light cut through the darkness as a flashlight searched for us like a spotlight seeking an escaped convict.

A Russian voice, broken and heavily accented, began giving directions to the Delta force soldiers. Their conversation ended as abruptly as it began. Two soldiers picked me up, one holding my feet, the other my arms. They dragged me into a room adjacent to the prayer hall.

A generator began to hum, its metallic cylinders erupting with noise, interrupting the otherwise quiet and oppressive environment. For once, I could momentarily drown out my racing thoughts with the noise. I found myself in a makeshift interrogation chamber. A long table stretched across the center of the room, flanked by harsh fluorescent lights that made me squint against the sudden brightness.

At the far end, a figure sat, shrouded in shadow. Flanked by two Russian soldiers standing at attention, their faces expressionless, the scene was ominous. On the ground, I noticed dried blood, its metallic scent mingling with the harsh smell of disinfectant. A loose tooth lay forlornly in the corner, a grim reminder of the fate that might await me.

“Welcome, Hoshea,” the figure spoke, his voice cold and detached. “I’ve been expecting you.”

The figure stepped into the light, revealing a face I had hoped never to see again. It was Colonel Ivanov, a notorious Spetsnaz officer known for his ruthlessness. He had haunted my nightmares ever since our paths crossed during my defense of Alaska. The sight of him now sent a chill down my spine, intensifying the already palpable fear in the room.

"Vell, Hoshea," Ivanov continued, his lips curling into a cruel smile, "I hope you’re ready. Executioner is coming. Vhen they told me coalition vas launching operation to capture you, I jumped at it first chance I got. Premier Obama wants to speak with you, but that isn’t going to happen after I’m done with you. You see, on ridge 104, many brave and valiant Spetsnaz died after being surrounded and slaughtered by you. They even surrendered, but you mercilessly mowed them down.”

“That wasn’t…”

“Shut up!" Ivanov slammed the table, his voice echoing in the room. "Now you listen." His eyes bore into mine, a mixture of hatred and twisted respect. "Now is time for my vengeance, but I also respect you as an enemy.”

He pulled out a bottle of vodka and two shot glasses from his bag, roughly setting them on the table. He began pouring both of us a shot. He held his glass up high.

I shrugged my shoulders. "My hands are zip tied. How am I going to drink?"

“Yes, of course.” Ivanov looked at one of the soldiers standing at attention closest to me. The soldier picked up the shot glass and brought it to my lips. The hard Russian vodka poured down my throat, burning in my stomach. I coughed.

“That’s some good shit,” I said between coughs, hoping my kindness might delay the inevitable. The alcohol rushed to my head, making me dizzy. I hadn’t eaten since the invasion started. Hunger pangs suddenly crept in, sharp and insistent.

Ivanov's smile widened as he downed his shot in one gulp. "You see, Hoshea, ve are not so different, you and I. Both fighters, both survivors. But today, your survival ends. Tell me, how does it feel to know your end is near?"

I met his gaze, trying to steady my voice. "You think you know me, Ivanov, but you have no idea what I've been through, what I've sacrificed. Today is not my end. God is with me; he will deliver me."

He leaned back, studying me with a mix of curiosity and disdain. "Maybe. Maybe God has sent me here as an agent of his wrath to punish you. How do you know God is for you, maybe he is for me. I follow the teachings of the Orthodox Church. You Jews do not know Jesus. You are heretics. You have killed many good Orthodox Christians. How can you say God is with you. Does God kill Orthodox Christians? I do not know everything about matters of religion or why God allows this man to live or that one to die. But I know this: you are a dead man walking. And I vill enjoy every moment of your suffering."

The room seemed to close in around me, the reality of my situation sinking in deeper. Ivanov's face was the most hardened I’d ever seen, lined with several scars that spoke of countless battles. I was surprised he had survived Alaska and the brutality of the conflict there. He and his soldiers had instilled fear on the Alaskan front with their hit-and-run tactics on our supply lines. They would attack our convoys and then vanish into thin air. We could never figure out how they avoided detection by our drones, night vision, and thermal equipment. Our robots would track them endlessly, only to end up with nothing.

One day, one of their soldiers made a mistake and used a mobile phone, allowing us to track their location. We eventually traced a large contingent of them to Ridge 104. A brazen captain, acting against my orders to capture and extract information, instead slaughtered them like pigs. We thought Ivanov was with that contingent and had died there.

But here he was, a ghost from my nightmares, a reminder of all the battles fought, the lives lost, and the thin line between survival and death. His presence now was a stark reminder that the past was never truly buried. He was here for revenge, but there was a grudging respect in his eyes, a recognition of the warrior he was about to destroy.

"Ivanov," I managed to say, my voice steady despite the fear gnawing at my insides. "I thought you died at Ridge 104."

He smiled, a cold, calculating smile that didn't reach his eyes. "You thought wrong, Hoshea. I survived, and I've been waiting for this moment ever since."

The air in the room grew thicker, the tension almost tangible. Ivanov stepped closer, his eyes never leaving mine. "Do you know what it's like to lose everything, Hoshea? To see your comrades fall, to be hunted like an animal? You made a mistake at Ridge 104, and now you're going to pay for it."

I swallowed hard, my mind racing. There had to be a way out of this, some way to turn the tables. But for now, I was at Ivanov's mercy, and I knew he wouldn't show any.

"Ivanov," I said again, trying to buy time, "we both know what war does to people. It makes monsters of us all. But this... this doesn't have to end in more bloodshed."

His smile widened, and he shook his head. "Oh, but it does, Hoshea. It does. Because this isn't just about revenge. This is about justice. For my men, for all the lives you've taken. And I will see it done."

The room seemed to close in even further, the weight of my past mistakes pressing down on me, I should have never let that captain take charge of that mission. Ivanov was right about one thing: there was no escaping the consequences of my actions. But as long as I was still breathing, there was a chance, however slim, to make things right.

"Let's get this over with, then," I said, squaring my shoulders. "I'm not afraid of you, Ivanov."

His laughter echoed through the room, a harsh, grating sound. "Oh, Hoshea, you should be. You should be very afraid."

"Drink, Hoshea," Ivanov said, pouring another shot. "Let us toast to old enemies and new beginnings. For you, it vill be the end. Your new enemy, the executioner, is almost here."

The soldier once again poured the shot down my throat. I became increasingly high, laughing out loud for no apparent reason. My tolerance for alcohol was incredibly low.

“So, send the executioner, I’m tired of waiting. Get on with it,” I demanded, my voice slurring slightly.

“Don’t vorry, Hoshea, he’ll be here any moment now,” the soldier replied, a smirk playing on his lips.

The door swung open. A towering man with hands as thick as tree branches entered, carrying a suitcase. His face was a mask of seriousness, and he moved with absolute precision, wasting no time in beginning his grim work. He placed the suitcase on the table, and my buzz suddenly disappeared. I became very alert, my heart pounding in my chest.

“So, this is President Levi, who killed millions of us on the Alaskan front,” the executioner said, his voice a deep, menacing rumble with a thick Russian accent. “This is going to be my greatest masterpiece.”

He opened the suitcase. Inside, neatly arranged, were a variety of instruments—knives of different sizes, syringes filled with unknown liquids, a roll of surgical tools, and a small vial containing a dark, ominous substance. There were also lengths of wire and a small, portable blowtorch. Each item was meticulously organized, shining under the harsh overhead light.

The executioner selected a scalpel, holding it up to the light to inspect its edge. “You know, President Levi, I’ve heard a lot about you. They say you’re a man of great power and influence. But here, in this room, you’re just another canvas for my work.”

He leaned in close, his eyes boring into mine. “Dis vill be a lesson for those who think they can escape justice. The pain you inflicted on others vill now be returned to you tenfold.”

My pulse quickened as he began his methodical preparation, his movements calculated and deliberate. Each second felt like an eternity, the reality of my impending fate sinking in with a cold, unrelenting grip.

The executioner looked back at the soldier who had been pouring the shots. “Make sure he stays conscious. I vant him to feel everything.”

The soldier nodded, stepping forward with another syringe, ready to ensure that my awareness remained sharp, my suffering uninterrupted.

As the executioner turned back to his suitcase, I could see the anticipation in his eyes. He was an artist about to create his magnum opus, and I was his unwilling canvas.

Ivanov picked up his chair and moved away from the table in order to give the executioner more space. He had a grim, almost jovial expression on his face, knowing full well the fate that have been decreed to me.

“I love a man who works with so much passion. He is a man after my own heart, said Ivanov jubilantly.”

The soldier standing at attention also had broad smiles laced across their faces.

“Do you have any requests, Ivanov? Which instrument of torture do you prefer that I start with? I mean, you are the host of this party,” the executioner asked, his tone dripping with mock politeness.

Ivanov began browsing the contents of the suitcase like a child browsing candy in a candy shop. He pointed at certain tools, inquiring about their purposes.

"What does this one do?" he asked, his fingers lingering over a wicked-looking blade.

The executioner smirked. “Ah, that’s a favorite. Perfect for slow, precise cuts. It’s all about the art of making the pain last.”

“And this?” Ivanov pointed at a syringe filled with a strange, glowing liquid.

“That, my friend, is a special blend. It heightens the nerves, making every touch feel like fire.”

Ivanov nodded, his smile widening. “Excellent. Let’s start with these, then.”

The executioner’s eyes gleamed with sadistic delight as he began his work, selecting the tools with a connoisseur’s care. The executioner took the syringe and with the help of the other two soldiers standing there found a vein of mine and injected the lethal looking substance into my body. After about five minutes my skin became very sensitive. The executioner, in order to test this, slapped my arm as hard as he could. The pain was double than what it normally would be.

I shouted, “You Russian pig!” The impact of his hand left a sweltering red mark which continued to burn long after he removed his hand.

“Oh, that’s excellent,” Ivanov said, like a giddy schoolboy.

“Now we begin with this one,” the executioner picked up the wicked-looking blade. He pressed the cold, hard steel against my skin, not cutting, but just teasing me. Its cold, unyielding feel was extra sensitive to the touch.

“You’re going to love this, Levi. The pain is going to be excruciating.”

He moved into position, ready to cut. His blade was about to press in and open my skin when suddenly the building above us shook, causing dusty debris and small stones to fall upon our heads.

The shaken Russians covered their heads. “What the fuck was that,” Ivanov said, visibly shaken.

The walkie-talkie on Ivanov’s belt crackled to life. He began speaking in Russian, his tone urgent. A look of shock painted itself across his face.

“Interesting, very interesting, hold your ground, make sure the enemy doesn’t reach the Dome of the Rock,” he said in Russian.

“We have a very interesting new development,” Ivanov translated, his voice edged with disbelief. “It seems as if around a thousand Orthodox Jews, mixed with the remnants of the remaining IDF in the city, have launched an all-out assault on the Dome of the Rock. I thought the Orthodox Jews didn’t believe in serving in the military. Comes to show you that religion is just a man’s convenience, don’t you think, Levi?”

His words hung in the air, the irony of the situation evident. The once composed executioner seemed unsettled, the blade in his hand trembling slightly.

“It seems I’m wanted upstairs to bolster our defense, unfortunately I must be absent for your greatest masterpiece, executioner,” his disappointment mixed with awe was readily apparent to me.

“Maybe, just maybe, God is with you. He’s delivered you from my hands, but he still hasn’t delivered you from the executioner’s hands. Let’s see Levi, lets see. I must bid you adieu. Till next time if you survive this,” as he was walking away, he began demanding VTOLs for extraction in Russian.

The building continued to shake and rumble. I looked at the executioner looking for any break in his resolve.

“You know they’re coming. If you run you might be able to survive. Why not leave and live to see another day, preform another work of art?”

“This will be my magnum opus. If I die today performing my greatest work of art, I’ll die a very happy man. This is my dedication, my legacy. Now come, President Levi, let’s dance.”

He twirled the blade in his hand like a conductor's baton.

“Dance, I said, Levi. Dance!” The blade came dangerously close to my skin, making the hair on my arms stand on end as my body tensed in dreaded anticipation of his initial cut. I squirmed in my chair. A thick rope held me firmly in place, my hands and feet still zip-tied. The more I struggled, the more he seemed to relish it.

“Yes, that’s better, Levi. I like the way you dance.” He slowly rested the blade across my arm. My skin split, and blood poured to the ground. I let out a deafening shout. Every nerve in my arm was on fire. I could see the veins inside my arm mixed within the flesh. I felt as if I was going to faint at the site of my own blood. He suddenly jammed the scapula right into my hand. I bit my lip till blood came trying as hard as I could to deny him the pleasure of hearing me shout.

“Oh, you don’t want to dance anymore, Levi? Let’s take something then. What shall it be? A toe, a finger—what will bring you to the floor once again, my darling?”

“How about your mom? That might do.”

“That won’t do, Levi. I know you’re above such petty insults. Say anything about my mom, and I’ll turn you into a eunuch.” He looked down at my groin with nefarious intent. Despite everything, I still had hope of surviving this, so I bit my tongue, desperately wanting to keep my testicles intact.

“A finger it is, you rascal. And then, maybe I’ll just cut out a testicle anyway.”

He dragged me by the chair to a nearby table and forcibly laid my hand upon it, slamming it against the surface. The impact sent a jolt of pain up my arm.

“You know, Levi,” he began, almost conversationally, as he pressed the blade against my skin, “I wasn’t always this refined in my methods. Back in the day, when I was just starting out with the Bratva, things were different. Cruder. Messier.”

He glanced at me, a twisted smile on his lips. “We didn't have the luxury of taking our time. When you needed to send a message, you had to be quick and efficient. I remember my first job—a man who killed patriotic Russians, like you. We caught him, beat him senseless, and then...we took his fingers, one by one.”

He chuckled, a cold, mirthless sound. “He screamed, of course. They always scream. But there’s something poetic about the act, don’t you think? A finger for every betrayal, a constant reminder of the price of disloyalty.”

The blade pressed harder against my skin, a thin line of blood appearing where the edge bit into my flesh. “Of course, over time, I learned to appreciate the art of it. The slow, methodical nature of the work. It’s not just about the pain—it’s about the anticipation, the fear. Watching as they realize what’s coming, seeing the terror in their eyes.”

He leaned in closer, his breath hot against my ear, smelling of nicotine and malice. “That’s what makes it truly satisfying. The look on their faces, the way they squirm. Just like you’re doing now, Levi. It’s beautiful, really.”

He lifted the blade slightly, drawing it along the length of my finger with sickening precision. Blood poured down, pooling on the table. I cried and laughed at the same time, a mix of hysteria and defiance. The executioner’s expression shifted to one of confusion.

“Are you enjoying this, Levi?”

“His joy is my strength. You will not gain the sick pleasure you are looking for out of my suffering. Your cuts are like fertilizer for my soul. Each cut causes it to grow and flourish.”

“Is that so, Levi? Then I’m like a farmer, and I must till your entire body, providing so much fertilizer for your soul that it poisons it. Hah! Ah, the Bratva taught me well. But I’ve surpassed even their expectations. Now, let’s see if this Bratva can be a gardener.”

He slashed the blade across my forearm, sending a fresh wave of pain and blood flowing. My vision blurred, but I forced myself to keep eye contact, to show no fear. His eyes narrowed, intrigued by my defiance.

“You think you're strong, Levi? You think you can withstand this? I will break you, piece by piece, until there's nothing left.”

His words were a sinister promise, each one dripping with malice. He grabbed my hand and pulled it taut, making each cut deliberate and excruciating. The smell of blood mixed with the musty air of the dimly lit room, and I could hear the distant hum of traffic outside, a stark contrast to the brutality happening within these walls.

The executioner’s face was a mask of sadistic glee, his eyes shining with a cold, unfeeling light. He took his time, savoring each moment, each cry of pain that escaped my lips. But deep down, I clung to a shred of hope. If I could endure this, if I could outlast his cruelty, maybe I could survive.

He drew another line of blood across my chest, the pain searing through my body. “Yes, scream for me, Levi,” he whispered, his voice a dark caress. “Just like old times.”

The room felt like it was closing in, the walls suffocating, the air thick with dread. But amidst the agony, I found a flicker of strength, a defiant spark that refused to be extinguished. The executioner was relentless, but so was my will to live.

“Let’s see how much fertilizer you can take before you wilt,” he sneered, lifting the blade once more. And as he brought it down, I braced myself, knowing that every moment I survived was a victory, no matter how small.

Suddenly, the power to the generator went out, plunging the room into darkness. I yanked my hand away and clasped my fist with my other hand, checking in disbelief that my finger was still there.

“I’m in here!” I shouted, my voice echoing off the damp, stone walls. The executioner punched me in the face with brutal force, sending a wave of pain through my skull. I spat out a mixture of blood and saliva, the metallic taste sharp on my tongue. He stepped away, his body shifting towards the door in the darkness, poised like a predator sensing its prey. He knew someone was about to enter and was waiting.

The door flew open with a deafening crash. The executioner moved with terrifying speed, grabbing the first soldier and ramming the scapula through their chin, the bone piercing up into their skull with a sickening crunch. Blood sprayed across the room as the soldier's body went limp.

The second soldier, eyes wide with shock, began firing rounds into the darkness with their Beretta. The muzzle flashes briefly illuminated the room, casting eerie, flickering shadows. I could see the soldier firing was Gabor. I tipped over my chair and fell to the ground, my heart pounding as I prayed to avoid the incoming ricocheting rounds. The bullets whizzed past, clinking off the walls and floor in a deadly symphony.

The executioner, unfazed by the chaos, lunged at Gabor. He pushed the handgun away just as another round fired off, the shot going wide. He delivered a powerful punch to Gabor’s jaw, the force of the blow echoing through the small room. The handgun slipped from Gabor’s grip, clattering to the ground and skidding into the darkness. Gabor recovered from the initial shock and quickly moved in close to the executioner, hitting him in the face followed by another punch to the stomach. The two grappled with each other, exchanging blows as they fell to the ground, their bodies thrashing in a deadly struggle.

I shuffled on the ground like a worm, searching desperately for the handgun. The two men were constantly exchanging blows, their grunts and screams exacerbating an already desperate situation. The sounds of fists connecting with flesh and bone were sickeningly loud in the confined space.

“Help me, Levi!” Gabor’s voice was strained, filled with both anger and desperation.

My hands searched frantically in the darkness, my fingers brushing against cold, hard surfaces until, finally, I felt the cold steel of the Beretta handle. A surge of hope and fear coursed through me as I grasped the gun, pulling it towards me. The struggle between Gabor and the executioner intensified, their movements becoming more frantic and violent.

The room seemed to close in around us, the air thick with the stench of sweat, blood, and fear. I fumbled with the gun, my fingers slick with sweat, as I tried to position it for a shot. My heart pounded in my chest, each beat echoing like a drum in my ears. The sounds of the fight, the heavy breathing, and the grunts of pain were almost deafening.

Lying on the ground, I aimed the gun into the darkness where I thought the door might be. I aimed as high as I could. I squeezed the trigger, and the single shot illuminated the room in a brief, blinding flash. In that instant, I saw the executioner on top of Gabor, slowly pushing down a knife, inching closer to Gabor’s chest.

I adjusted my aim into the darkness where I had seen the executioner. My hands trembled as I continually pulled the trigger, letting off a flurry of bullets until the magazine was empty. The gun's recoil jolted through me with each shot, but I kept pulling the trigger, even after the last round had been fired.

The room fell into a heavy silence, broken only by the sound of two sets of labored breathing in the darkness. My heart raced, the echoes of gunfire still ringing in my ears. I strained to see through the gloom, my eyes adjusting slowly to the lack of light.

“Gabor?” I called out, my voice shaky.

A groan responded, followed by a cough. “Levi... I’m... still here,” Gabor’s voice was weak but alive. “You hit Goliath in the head.”

I could hear Gabor struggling under the weight of the executioner’s body. With a grunt, he pushed the man off onto the ground. The executioner’s breaths were shallow and labored, the life gradually ebbing away until he breathed his last.

Gabor sat up, the faint outline of his body visible in the darkness. “Oy vey,” he muttered under his breath, catching it for a moment. “Let’s get out of here. They’re going to blow the Dome of the Rock any moment now.”

He turned on a small flashlight and began cutting away my restraints with the bloody knife that had been used to fight the executioner. Once I was free, we wasted no time and hurried to the stairs. We climbed the stairs to the entrance of the mosque, the narrow passageway feeling like it was closing in on us. Bodies of Spetsnaz, American Delta Force, and jihadists littered the hallway; in the darkness, it was a challenge to keep from stumbling over their gear.

“We need to be quick,” Gabor whispered, his voice tense. “There could be more of them. And trust me, I’m not looking for another fight.”

We moved cautiously, our footsteps echoing in the silent corridor. I continually scanned the environment with the Beretta in my hand. Gabor led the way, his flashlight cutting through the darkness, illuminating our path.

We reached the entrance. VTOLs hovered overhead, their heavy machine guns spitting fire into the surrounding buildings. The night was torn apart by the relentless gunfire, a cacophony of destruction echoing through the city. A rocket streaked up in retaliation, its trail a fiery arc before it struck one of the VTOLs. The craft shuddered, lost control, and spiraled into a nearby building, erupting in a massive fireball that lit up the night.

Amidst the chaos, Gabor and I ducked low, moving swiftly but cautiously across the open courtyard. The roar of the VTOL engines and the staccato of gunfire filled the air, creating a scene of utter bedlam. Smoke and dust swirled around us, mingling with the acrid scent of burning fuel and charred debris. We could feel the heat from the explosions, the ground trembling beneath our feet.

The VTOLs, now retreating, still fired sporadically, their gunners hanging from the open doors, spraying bullets to cover their escape. The night sky was a kaleidoscope of muzzle flashes and tracer rounds, an eerie and deadly light show that painted the chaos in stark relief.

We sprinted toward a nearby alleyway, seeking shelter from the aerial assault. The narrow alley was filled with the remnants of the day’s bustling activity—overturned market stalls, discarded goods, and debris from the conflict. We navigated the obstacles as quickly as we could, our breaths coming in short, ragged gasps.

As we emerged from the alley, the distant sounds of explosions and gunfire grew fainter, replaced by the eerie silence of the deserted streets. The city, once alive with the sounds of everyday life, now felt like a warzone. The streets were empty, the buildings dark and foreboding.

“Hold on a minute,” Gabor said, leaning against a wall. “Let’s catch our breath. We should be safe here, b’ezrat Hashem.”

Just as we thought we had a moment to catch our breath, a loud explosion erupted behind us. We turned to see a massive fireball rising into the night sky, the Dome of the Rock engulfed in flames. The IDF and Orthodox Jews had set explosives around the mosque, timing the detonation for their safe withdrawal. The historic site crumbled amidst the inferno, the sound of the blast reverberating through the city.

Just as planned, news regarding the destruction of the Dome of the Rock spread like wildfire around the city. Angered Muslims quickly rallied around Hamas, organizing an assault on Jewish settlements. The IDF had anticipated this response and was prepared. Snipers strategically positioned throughout the city and fortified machine gun nests were ready to counter the attack. As the assaulting Muslims advanced, they were met with a devastatingly effective defense. The snipers picked off key targets with precision, while the machine gun nests unleashed a relentless barrage, decimating the attacking forces. The IDF’s plan had worked. The city descended into somewhat peaceful calm before the storm as coalition forces continued their steady progress and advance throughout Israel.

A looming mushroom cloud haunted the horizon as the gentle hue of dawn broke through the darkness. The ominous sight cast a pall over the victory that had been achieved by destroying the Dome of the Rock. The rising sun's soft light contrasted sharply with the dark, billowing cloud, painting a surreal and foreboding scene on the morning sky.

“Tel Aviv is gone, Gabor,” I said, my heart heavy with sorrow.

Gabor sighed, his voice thick with emotion. “We must fight for the living, not mourn the dead. Zichronam livracha... We’ve got to make it back to your wife and ensure her safety.”

“You’re from Tel Aviv?” I asked, sensing the depth of his pain.

Gabor quietly acknowledged this with a nod, his eyes glistening. The tears he held back were a testament to his immense strength and the personal agony he was enduring. The sight of the mushroom cloud, the symbol of Tel Aviv's destruction, was almost too much for him to bear.

My own heart ached with loss. The events of the day had left scars that would never fully heal. I had blood on my hands now, having shot the executioner in a desperate bid for survival. Up until that point, I had led American soldiers into battle as a figurehead, a symbol to inspire courage and resolve. I had never truly engaged in the brutal, up-close reality of combat. That day was different. I had killed a man—someone’s father, someone’s husband—because of my actions.

“They’re all gone, all of them,” Gabor’s voice broke, his strength giving way to overwhelming grief. “My entire family is dead. I can’t go on anymore. There’s no more point in fighting. Everything... it’s all been lost. I want to die. I want to join them in the grave.”

“It’s not true. Dipti is still alive, don’t you remember? You just said we have to ensure her safety.”

“There’s no point,” he said, his voice thick with sorrow. “We’re all going to die like my family... gone in an instant, like the millions of Jews before. My mother, she loved to sit in the early morning, drinking tea with my father while he read the newspaper. My sister, she was getting married soon... her life was set. They were always so worried about me, always calling, making sure I was sober. They wanted me to be the best soldier I could be, to make our family proud. They were Jews who loved Hashem, who believed He would protect us. But look at us now... it’s all lies. What’s the point of believing in anything if it can all be taken away so easily?”

Gabor’s voice trembled with a mix of anger and sorrow. “Everything they believed in, everything they lived for—it’s all gone in an instant. What’s the point of believing in anything if it can all be taken away so easily?”

His body shook with silent sobs, the weight of his grief crushing him. The stoic front he had held up until now crumbled, revealing the real Gabor—completely broken, his strength shattered.

“Gabor,” I said softly, placing my blood-stained hand on his shoulder. “I know you’re in pain. I know it feels like there’s no hope. But we have to keep going. For Dipti, for ourselves. We can’t give up now. I cried so many nights in prison, not knowing when or how I’d get bail or when I was overseas in Iraq if I’d ever go home. But every time, Hashem delivered me from all these things. Your family might still be alive; don’t lose hope. Even if they are gone, they’re in a better place now.”

Gabor looked at me, his eyes filled with despair and a flicker of hope. “I don’t know if I have the strength,” he whispered. “I don’t know if I can keep fighting.”

“We’ll do it together,” I replied. “We’ll find a way. One step at a time. We can’t let their deaths be in vain. Let’s find Dipti. She must be waiting for us at the HQ.”

I helped Gabor up, patting him on the shoulder as he stood with his head held high. We followed the narrow streets back to the makeshift headquarters. It was faintly dark as dawn rose slowly, giving its warm, piercing rays, bringing the city back to life after a night of chaos. The authorities were scrambling, rushing to find survivors beneath the many destroyed stone buildings. Debris and dead bodies littered the streets, and the air was thick with dust and smoke. The hunched-over remains of HKRs lined the narrow streets, their internal circuit boards fried from the blasts of EMP rifles. Several VTOLs found themselves stuck in buildings after crashing during their landing. The once vibrant city was now a landscape of ruin and devastation. Cries for help echoed from the rubble, mingling with the shouts of rescue workers and the distant wail of sirens.

As we walked, Gabor’s steps were heavy and slow, each one a testament to the weight of his grief. My own legs felt like lead, the emotional toll of the night’s events sapping my strength. We moved past shattered storefronts and crumbling facades, the remnants of what had been bustling businesses and homes.

“We need to get you to a doctor, Levi. You’ve lost a lot of blood.”

I looked at Gabor’s face. It was swollen, his eyes bloodshot and unfocused. The executioner had almost pulverized him into a pulp of the man he used to be. His breath came in ragged gasps, each one a testament to the brutality he had endured. I tried to focus, but my vision became blurry and my head light. The wicked world spun around me, and I felt myself slipping away into the darkness. I passed out, the last image in my mind being Gabor’s battered face.

# Chapter 10

On the second day of the invasion of Israel the Obamas decided to throw a party in celebration of the defeat of Israel. The party started in the afternoon and continued late into the night. The grand ballroom of the White House had been transformed into a scene of opulence. Crystal chandeliers, each larger than a small car, hung from the ceiling, casting a shimmering glow over the room. Each table was adorned with silk linens, gold-plated cutlery, and centrepieces made from rare, exotic flowers flown in from the most remote corners of the world, just for the occasion. The air was thick with the scent of perfumes so expensive that their price tags alone could fund a small nation, and the heady aroma of gourmet dishes prepared by the world’s top chefs in adjacent kitchens.

Barack and Michael Obama stood at the entrance, greeting each world leader as they arrived. Barack was dressed in a custom-tailored tuxedo with a sheen that suggested it had been woven from the silk of golden spiders, while Michael wore a sleek, tailored suit that sparkled with every movement, its intricate beadwork catching the light in a dazzling display. They smiled and exchanged pleasantries, their demeanor calm and composed, belying the chaos unfolding overseas.

Inside, the party was in full swing. A band played lively jazz music, and waitstaff circulated with trays of champagne and canapés that likely cost more than the average person's monthly salary. In one corner, a magician performed sleight-of-hand tricks, drawing gasps of amazement from a small crowd of sycophants. In another, a group of performers in elaborate, barely-there costumes danced and twirled, their movements hypnotic and entrancing.

The entire party stopped when the Duchess of Jerusalem, Kamala Harris, made her grand entrance. She arrived in a manner reminiscent of Netflix’s Queen Cleopatra, riding upon a luxurious bed hoisted by shirtless white slaves. These slaves wore black ties around their necks and black leather pants that accentuated their fit, firm buttocks. The display was nothing short of regal, exuding an air of royalty as only the Duchess could do.

The Duchess was much darker now than she had been when she lost the presidency to Donald Trump. She had been using skin-darkening cream for many years and had perfected her use of the black accent. Her old vanilla white person way of speaking had completely vanished. She now sounded like she was from the hood when she spoke, an affectation as comical as it was inappropriate.

Kamala herself was a vision of imperial splendor. Draped in a gown of shimmering gold fabric that clung to her form like a second skin, she wore an elaborate headdress adorned with jewels that sparkled under the chandelier light. Her presence commanded attention, and as she was carried into the room, all eyes were drawn to her.

The slaves, their bodies glistening with a sheen of oil, moved with disciplined precision, their expressions stoic and unwavering. They exuded male sexuality at its utmost, their chiseled physiques a stark contrast to the extravagant luxury surrounding them. As they brought the bed to a stop in the center of the ballroom, they lowered it so Kamala could gracefully descend, her movements slow and deliberate, each step a performance in itself.

Once she was fully off the bed, her entourage of white male sex slaves burst into a Madonnaesque dance routine with Kamala at the center. "Material Girl" began to loudly play from hidden speakers, and the surreal spectacle unfolded. One slave offered flowers, which she threw to the ground and walked over. Another slave got on the ground so she could walk on him rather than deign to touch the floor herself. One slave grabbed her hand while another did the same, engaging in a playful tug of war. The Duchess wore a wide, exaggerated grin, overacting like a South Indian actress. Eventually, one slave let go, and she twirled into the arms of the other, bending over backward, her head arched toward the ground with the slave’s hand as support.

Kamala’s husband was dressed as Zorro. He wore a black, wide-brimmed hat that cast a shadow over his face, its edges adorned with gaudy, sparkling sequins. His mask, meant to be dashing, was more of a cheap, oversized piece of fabric that barely clung to his sweaty face. The black cape was made of shiny, synthetic material that rustled loudly with every movement, its hem tattered and uneven.

His shirt, once a crisp, white blouse, was now stained and stretched over his bulging midsection. The ruffled collar and cuffs, meant to convey elegance, were frayed and limp. The black pants, too tight and ill-fitting, emphasized his considerable girth rather than the lean agility Zorro was known for. A belt with an oversized, rhinestone-encrusted buckle strained to hold everything together, and his boots, which were supposed to be sleek and polished, were scuffed and mismatched.

Kamala’s husband, looked on as part of the crowd his identity hidden, visibly aroused and caressing his genitals at the sight of so many men handling his wife. He wanted to join in and dance but restrained himself. Grossly overweight and dripping with sweat, he feared his presence might detract from the grand spectacle. A hint of jealousy marked his face, but he quickly wiped it off, remembering he was a slave now and had no right to protest his wife’s dalliances.

Midway through the song, Madonna herself appeared, joining the Duchess. Madonna looked otherworldly; years of Botox and plastic surgery had completely disfigured her face, making her look more like a ghoul than a pop icon. She floated into the dance routine like Baron Harkonnen, the white sex slaves dancing and cavorting with the two elderly cougars for several more minutes. If any common man saw such a spectacle, he might vomit at the sight, but in the state of the world as it was, the ghastly was beautiful.

The room went crazy; the guests shouted and whistled, captivated by the spectacle. Barack and Michael approached Kamala, extending their hands in welcome. Kamala smiled, a look of serene confidence on her face. "Thank you, my niggas, for the grand reception," she said, her voice carrying a hint of amusement and an exaggerated drawl that seemed to mock the very people she aimed to emulate.

The crowd began chanting in unison, “Speech! Speech! Speech! Speech! Speech!”

“You all know that Israel is a powerful country. Gaza is a weak country. Gaza has been under the control of Israel for the past 10 years. Since Israel is a powerful country and Gaza is a weaker country, that’s wrong. And in this situation, we must recognize the dynamics at play. Power dynamics are important because, as we know, a powerful country like Israel can impose its will on a weaker country like Gaza, and that is not justice. Justice is about balance, and imbalance is injustice.

You know I was defeated by Donald Trump in a fraudulent election. That’s okay. What can be has been unburdened from what has been. Donald Trump was killed in the reformation, and that’s okay because he did wrong and we had to be unburdened by what has been. He represented everything that was against progress and justice. He was a powerful man who used his power unjustly, much like Israel has done to Gaza. We must understand these parallels.

We have to do what we have always done, and that's what we will always do. You see, it is time for us to do what we have been doing, and that time is every day. I say this not to say what we can’t do, but to say what we will do. And we will do it because we have the power to do what we need to do when we need to do it. Much like how Gaza needs to reclaim its power, we must reclaim ours in the face of past injustices.

I believe that the best way to predict the future is to do the work today for tomorrow’s future because that is how we move forward. And moving forward is what we must do. Because if we don't, then we are not moving forward. We must move forward to get to where we need to go. Much like how Israel must move towards peace and equality with Gaza, we must move towards a more just and equitable future.

And let us remember, we are doing this because we are who we are. And when we are who we are, we can do what needs to be done to achieve what must be achieved. This is the essence of progress. Progress is about moving forward, not backward. So, let’s continue to do what we do, moving forward, because forward is where we need to be. Just as Gaza needs to move forward from its oppression, we need to move forward from the era of Donald Trump and towards a brighter future and that brighter future is now. All the greater things we planned on achieving were achieved during the reformation.”

She felt slightly tipsy and almost stumbled over but composed herself and continued. She was about to begin speaking, but her husband, or should I say Zorro, appeared beside her.

He obviously had been drinking way too much. He staggered slightly, his face flushed and eyes unfocused.

“I am so tired of this bitch and her alphabet soups and her stupid speeeeeches,” he slurred, his words barely coherent. “She gives me the same stupid speeches at home and I’ve had it. I want a divorce from you. Because all of this,” he motioned over his entire body, “Can have anything it wants.” He looked at Kamala with attitude.

The room fell silent, shocked by the sudden outburst. Barack motioned towards someone in the crowd, his eyes wide with surprise, and then looked at Zorro, squinting with a mix of disbelief and concern.

Several secret service agents began moving in on Zorro. He began running and they gave chase. The party was still in full swing. They collided with the revellers knocking over drinks and food. Zorro had pulled out his plastic sword and was waving it in the air shouting “White husbands have rights too!!!”

Michael put his arm around Kamala and gave her a nice hug while smiling at the crowd. “Don’t worry, we’ll find you a new husband.” The crowd laughed, thinking it was a joke, but Kamala knew deep down inside Michael was serious.

As she wandered toward the general direction of where her husband had fled, her mind raced. The vibrant lights and jubilant faces around her blurred into a chaotic swirl. Her heart pounded, not from exertion but from fear and anxiety. Each step felt heavy, as if the weight of her choices was dragging her down.

Kamala's husband, now a fugitive, would most definitely be executed on the White House lawns. The thought of it made her stomach churn. She could already picture the scene: her husband's lifeless body lying in the manicured grass, blood staining the pristine landscape, right in front of a crowd that barely understood the gravity of what they were witnessing.

Just yesterday, Kamala had been at the height of her power within the AOC, basking in the admiration and respect she had fought so hard to earn. The night had seemed like a summation of her progress and achievements. But now, it was the greatest disaster of her life. Everything she had built, everything she had believed in, was crumbling around her.

Whatever humanity was left in her convoluted mind, full of twists and contradictions from years of living the distorted lies of the socialist American party, screamed and cried out as the last vestige of her humanity was being ripped out from her heart. She tried to justify his execution from her own logic, “What I can be must be unburdened by what has been. He is what has been. There is a new future of progress ahead of me.”

Her pace quickened as she neared the area where her husband was being handcuffed. The crowd around him was jeering and booing, their faces twisted with anger and contempt. The chant began to rise, a brutal, rhythmic chorus that echoed off the walls of the historic building.

“Kill fat Zorro! Kill fat Zorro! Zorro is an oppressor! Down with the white oppressor!”

Kamala's emotions were a turbulent storm. She was smiling and crying at the same time, her face a mask of conflicting feelings. Should she join in with their chanting or rush to her husband’s aid and prevent his execution? With her power and authority, she might be able to stop it. But what would the crowd think? Fear of the masses paralyzed her. Would Barack and Michael allow her the same esteem and elevation once they found out her intervention?

As she stood there, torn between loyalty to her husband and her fear of losing her standing, the chanting grew louder. The execution squad was preparing for the grim task ahead. Kamala took a deep breath, her mind racing through the possible outcomes of each choice she could make. The night was thick with tension, and Kamala knew that whatever decision she made, it would change her life forever.

She remembered the sayings of Jesus, whom her father often quoted to her: “I will turn father against son, mother against daughter; your own family will hate you because of me.” The AOC was her family, the only family she had ever known. Now they were going to hate her because she knew what she had to do.

She could hear the festivities continuing, the crowd becoming livelier as Madonna belted out "Like a Virgin," one of her favorite songs. But her husband, having had too much to drink, had ruined everything. Her life, "our life," she corrected herself while thinking out loud, was about to be destroyed.

She followed the execution squad as they escorted him toward the lawn, far away from the building so no one could interfere or watch. She kept heckling, unable to understand why. Why was she laughing? This was the most horrible thing that had ever happened to her, and she was laughing. Even the masked goons assigned to the horrible and ungodly task occasionally looked at each other, elbowing each other in bewilderment at her outbursts of laughter. They had never seen such a crazy woman in their entire lives.

While laughing, she kept saying, "Hey, you guys aren’t really going to kill him, are you? Come on, guys, this is just for show. You can’t seriously kill one of the most powerful women’s husbands for just a slight interruption. He does this stupid shit all the time when he gets drunk."

Her laughter continued, a hysterical, uncontrollable reaction to the horror unfolding before her. The sound of it mingled with the music and the crowd's cheers, creating a surreal backdrop to the tragedy.

Zorro was still drunk.

“Kammie quit laughing. They’re going to kill me. Wait, I can’t die. Come on guys, quit joking, let me go. Kammie, do something! I don’t want to die.” He was crying uncontrollably.

Both were crazy. One was laughing hysterically while the other was sobbing with a deep mourning that can only be done from someone who has lived a life full of regret.

“I never meant what I said Kammie, I don’t want to divorce you.”

They put him up against a Magnolia tree, one of the most famous on the White House lawn. A tree whose planting was in dedication to Andrew Jackson’s dead spouse. Zorro knew its significance.

“It’s fitting I’m going to die in front of Andrew Jackson’s Magnolia tree,” Dougie muttered, his voice trembling with a mix of resignation and bitterness.

“You’re not going to die,” Kamala snapped, her laughter abruptly ceasing as she struggled to regain control. “I want all of you to stand down now. I’ve had it up here,” she placed her hand parallel to the ground but above her head, emphasizing her frustration, “with this ridiculous joke.”

Her sudden shift to seriousness caught the attention of the goons. One of them got on his radio, hesitating as he relayed her demand. “She’s telling us to stand down. What should I do?”

Static crackled over the radio, followed by a cold, authoritative voice dictating orders. “Put her against the tree and then you know what to do,” the voice commanded.

The goon closest to Kamala grabbed her roughly, forcing her towards the Magnolia tree. She stumbled back, colliding with her husband. Dougie instinctively caught her, stabilizing them both.

“We’ll die together, Dougie,” she whispered, her voice filled with a mix of defiance and despair.

“At least let us see your faces,” Dougie pleaded. “Why do you hide behind those black ski masks?”

The leader of the goons smirked and nodded. “Sure, guys, take off your ski masks.”

One by one, they removed their masks, revealing their faces. They were all white, with hair ranging from blonde to brown.

“Do you like what you see?” the leader taunted. “We’re all white devils. Haven’t you heard that the Devil often masquerades as an angel of white light. Who do you think was behind the Reformation? White people. Who do you think is in charge of Obama? White people. The richest families in this country are white and are still calling the shots. Obama is like a slave to them. We only use DEI to oppress and control the poor whites. The ones who love Levi and Trump.”

Kamala’s mind raced as she processed the revelation. The sinister truth behind the movement she once championed was now laid bare before her. The Magnolia tree’s ancient branches seemed to shudder in the wind, as if bearing witness to the unfolding tragedy.

“Where’s your laughter now, bitch?” The one in charge put his rifle’s muzzle against her forehead.

“You’re not black, bitch, you’re Asian. It makes us cringe to see you pretend to be black, but they think it’s necessary so they can cover all their black and Asian bases. You’re like a big fucking DEI concoction, brewed with bullshit and then thrown on the American public. It’s like the American public is the crowd at a Miley Cyrus concert and are getting gizzed on by Miley.”

Kamala felt the cold metal against her skin, helpless underneath the weight of his words. Her mind raced through her options, calculating her next move with precision. She could feel Dougie’s grip tighten around her waist. Was there nothing she could do.

“But the truth is, you’re disposable. The moment they no longer need you you’re vaporized. The moment they think you’re too smart and begin to question the party line and leadership you’re dead. You’ve outlived your usefulness Kamala Harris. The moment you thought that you had the authority to stop his execution is the moment of your downfall. Now brace yourself.”

They locked and loaded their weapons and put them up to their shoulders ready to fire. Silenced bursts of gunfire hit their heads in the full moonlight as fireflies danced unaware of the death they danced around. Blood and brains splattered on Kamala and Doug. The bodies of the four goons collapsed on the ground before them. After the shock of what just happened settled in on Kamala, she began her heckle again, the nervous tick of laughter when she didn’t know how to respond or deal with the situation that was being pressed upon her. Doug’s mouth drooped wide open; his eyes caught in a static vertex completely glazed over by shock at what had just unfolded before his eyes.

Two gunmen appeared from the darkness.

Duchess Harris, you and your husband must come with us if you want to live. The men whose faces were illuminated by the moon were black and white, a rare display of racial unity. One the men carried in his hands something black and blocky, whose form was hidden despite the full moon, whose contents he threw at the duchess. The couple flinched at the sight of something flying at them, maybe it was ptsd as a result of the horrible scene which they had just witnessed. The contents hit them and fell to the ground.

“We need you to pick up those masks and put them on your face. The masks are highly realistic and should snuggly fit to the form of your face. It is a popular theme at the party tonight to imitate white people. Many of the partygoers are wearing white masks so you should fit in perfectly.”

Doug took off his Zorro mask and wide brimmed hat. Kamala and Doug put on the masks caressing and pushing on them until the masks fit snugly along the contours of their faces. They looked at each other.

“Hey you’re Margaret Thatcher,” said Kamala shocked.

“You’re Abraham Lincoln.”

“Now follow us.” The men said slightly smirking with amusement at the sight of their masks.

The couple followed the mysterious figures across the White House lawn. They moved swiftly, their feet barely making a sound on the manicured grass. Kamala's mind raced as she tried to process the night's events, her thoughts a chaotic whirlwind of fear, confusion, and anger.

As they neared a secluded part of the grounds, the men stopped and turned to face them. "We need to get you out of here," one of them said, his voice low and urgent. "There are people inside the AOC who still value your life. There are still people who believe in the founding fathers’ vision for our country working inside this current dictatorship from within trying to topple it. We believe you can help us. But you need to trust us and move quickly. "

Kamala nodded, her body trembling with adrenaline. Dougie clung to her, his eyes wide with fear. "Where are we going?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"There's a safe house nearby," the other man replied. "We'll take you there and figure out our next steps."

The group moved quickly, weaving through the shadows cast by the grand White House. The opulent ballroom and its droning, brain washed, guests seemed a world away now, replaced by the stark reality of their situation. Kamala's mind was a blur, her thoughts racing as she tried to make sense of the night's events. They had to enter the White House briefly in order to reach a hidden entrance that was contained in one of the mansions many rooms.

As they navigated through the labyrinthine corridors, Doug bumped into a partygoer, who looked at him with mocking delight. “Woah! Margerat Thatcher! You’re on the rag. Better put a pad on that thing and Lincoln you’ve just been shot!”

Doug momentarily forgot about the men who were just shot in front of him, whose blood now splattered his clothes towards the lower part of his body. Channeling his best feminine British accent, he responded with a biting wit.

“The iron lady is bloody tough; she doesn’t require a pad,” Doug shouted above the music.

The guy stumbled while giving Doug a high five his laughter was audible above the deafening noise of the party.

“That’s awesome, have fun you guys, and thanks for freeing the slaves!”

They smiled at the men and then continued through the White House, their pace quickening. The tension in the air was palpable, each step bringing them closer to an uncertain fate. Kamala's heart pounded in her chest, the gravity of their situation pressing down on her. She glanced at Doug, who, despite the fear and confusion, managed to maintain a semblance of composure.

They entered the room where hidden entrance was within reach. One of the men pushed open a discreet panel in the wall, revealing a narrow staircase descending into darkness. They ushered Kamala and Doug inside, the heavy panel sliding shut behind them. The sound of the ballroom's festivities faded.

"I'm sorry, Mike."

Michael responded with a swift punch to Barack's stomach, knocking the air out of his lungs. Barack doubled over, gasping for breath.

"Sorry isn’t good enough!" Michael shouted, his face twisted with rage. "Do you have any idea what this means? Do you?"

"I was trying to handle it, I swear," Barack gasped, still hunched over, his voice trembling.

Michael grabbed Barack by the collar, lifting him slightly before shoving him hard against the wall. "Handle it? You’ve jeopardized everything! Everything we’ve built, everything we’ve planned! Harris is no longer a tool under our thumb. She’s the second most powerful face in the AOC, and I’m sure she’s now working with those who oppose us."

Barack’s eyes widened with fear. "I didn’t mean for this to happen."

"Meaning doesn’t matter," Michael hissed, tightening his grip. "Results do. And you’ve failed. Miserably."

Michael released him, letting Barack slump to the floor. "Get up. We have a war to win, and I need you focused. No more mistakes."

Barack struggled to his feet, his body aching. "Yes, Mike."

Michael stared at him for a moment longer before turning away. "Clean yourself up. We’ll deal with this mess, but you better not let it happen again."

Barack nodded, his face a mix of pain and determination. "I won’t. I promise."

"Good," Michael said coldly. "Now get out of my sight. Go back to the party and entertain our guests."

Barack left Michael’s presence like a dog who had just been chastised, slinking back to the party with his tail between his legs.

Once out of Michael's presence, Big Mike's dominance weighed heavily on Barack, a force that controlled every aspect of his life. The dynamic between them had always been fraught with tension and violence, a twisted bond forged over years of abuse and manipulation.

Barack’s hands trembled as he adjusted his tie, the memory of Big Mike’s wrath still fresh in his mind. Big Mike was dangerous when things didn’t go according to plan, and Barack had learned to fear the consequences.

Their relationship was complex, rooted in control and submission. The physical abuse was just one aspect; the psychological hold Big Mike had over Barack was even more profound. Barack had become accustomed to the domination, even craving it at times. The beatings, though painful, were a perverse reminder of Big Mike's power and authority, keeping Barack in line and focused on their shared ambitions.

But it wasn't just fear that kept Barack tied to Big Mike. There was a sick, twisted love between them, born out of years of shared secrets and dark desires. The violence was part of their bond, a brutal dance that had defined their relationship from the beginning. And as much as Barack resented it, he couldn’t imagine life without it. Big Mike needed to keep him motivated and focused, and there was no more effective incentive than a good old-fashioned beating.

The sex was good too, even after all these years of abuse. It was intense, passionate, and filled with the same power struggles that marked every other aspect of their relationship. For Barack, it was both a release and a reminder of his place in Big Mike’s world—a world where failure was met with punishment, and success was rewarded with fleeting moments of tenderness.

As Barack re-entered the grand ballroom, it felt like stepping out of a murky swamp where he could sink at any moment, onto solid ground where he knew his place. He forced a smile, feeling like a helpless housewife in a Lifetime movie. No one must ever know what had just transpired, or see the fear and pain lurking behind his eyes. If they did, they wouldn’t understand the twisted bond of joy and love he and Big Mike had shared all these years. He had a role to play, and play it he would. After all, he had made a promise to Big Mike—no more mistakes. But in the coming days, he was unwittingly stepping into the biggest mistake of his life.

# Chapter 11

Lot's bleeding had slowed to a mere trickle, but Raskin kept his hands pressed firmly on the wound, his fingers trembling only slightly. Lot had lost a lot of blood, his situation precarious, there was a race against time to treat his wounds. Through the eerie green glow of his NVGs, Raskin watched Lieutenant Daniels standing a few paces away. The strain and fury etched into Daniels' features were unmistakable, even in the distorted, ghostly light.

"They nuked us. I’m done with this operation. To hell with the coalition. Who’s with me?" Daniels' voice was taut with the bitterness of betrayal. The memory of fallen comrades—men he had bled alongside in Alaska and China—flashed before his eyes. They had fought with honor, sacrificing everything to defend their country. And now, they had been sacrificed in return, discarded by the very Army they had served—all for the sake of racial equality. The anger surged within him, too much to contain.

“Where is the equality in sacrificing white lives for black soldiers?”

“Keep your voices down; there could be enemy soldiers in these tunnels,” Sgt. Hess snapped, though his tone was more cautionary than confrontational. The knowledge that Daniels, despite his visible turmoil, was still the highest-ranking officer, made the situation precarious.

Daniels turned a steely gaze on Hess, the sharpness in his eyes cutting through the green-tinted darkness. "You don’t get it, do you? We’re nothing to them. Expendable. They’d nuke us in a heartbeat if it meant saving their own skins." His words carried the weight of command, but also the deep sting of disillusionment.

Hess felt a chill run through him. He knew the danger of pushing Daniels too hard, of provoking a man teetering on the edge. But he also recognized the peril of following a leader who had lost his nerve. As Daniels' words echoed through the tunnel, Hess found himself weighing the unthinkable. If Daniels couldn’t hold it together—if his breakdown threatened the lives of the entire squad—Hess might have to make a decision no soldier should ever face.

The thought gnawed at him, dark and insidious. Could he do it? Could he kill his commanding officer if it meant saving the others? The squad had been through hell together, and Hess had seen men break under less. But Daniels had always been the rock, the one who kept them going. Now, that rock was crumbling, and Hess wasn’t sure if the pieces could be put back together in time.

"Sir," Hess said, his voice steady but carrying a weight that hadn’t been there before, "We all know what’s at stake. But if we don’t complete the mission, we’re dead either way. We follow your lead, but we need to stay focused."

Raskin, still working to stabilize Lot, glanced up, tension etched into his features. "Lieutenant, Lot needs medical attention. We can debate the mission later, but right now, we need to get him out of here."

Daniels clenched his jaw, the muscles in his face tightening as he wrestled with his emotions. As much as he wanted to rebel, to abandon the mission and denounce the orders that had brought them to this point, his duty as their commanding officer weighed heavily on him. "Alright," he finally said, his voice thick with barely contained anger. "We move out. But understand this—we’re not following orders blindly anymore. We get Lot to safety, then we reassess once we reach the surface."

The squad exchanged tense glances, silently acknowledging the shift in their situation. Daniels was still in charge, but the unshakable trust they once had in their chain of command had been shattered. Now, they were a unit held together by the barest thread of shared survival instinct.

As they prepared to move, the darkness seemed to press in closer, the green flicker from their NVGs the only defense against the encroaching void. Hess’s hand hovered near his weapon; the weight of his decision still heavy on his mind. Each man understood that the true challenge lay ahead—not just in confronting their enemies, but in grappling with the growing fractures within their own ranks and the uncertainty of whether their leader could guide them through the storm that awaited.

And in the back of Hess’s mind, a cold, quiet resolve began to form. If it came down to it, he would do what needed to be done, even if that meant taking the life of the man who had once led them with unwavering conviction. The great united cause that bound humanity together as one man must be fulfilled at all costs. Liberating the Palestinians was greater than each individual life. It meant more than their families, more than their skin color, and if one appendage of the great united body of humanity ceased to work properly then it must be cut off for the body of humanity to continue striving for this ultimate goal.

I slowly began to open my eyes, the world around me coming into focus in a haze of ancient rock walls and sterile smells. The faint beeping of monitors mixed with the murmur of voices. Dipti was there, her eyes filled with a mixture of relief and concern, while Gabor stood by the door, his arms crossed, looking more worn than I’d ever seen him. In the background, a nurse moved hurriedly between patients, her face a mask of professional focus. Other staff were packing items into crates, the urgency in their movements unmistakable. Supplies were being loaded onto trolleys, and the occasional shout cut through the general bustle as orders were barked.

A nurse appeared at my side, checking my vitals with swift, practiced motions. Her hands were steady, but there was an underlying tension in the way she worked, a sense of controlled chaos that permeated the room.

“He’s looking better,” the nurse said, glancing up at Dipti and Gabor. “He lost a lot of blood, but he’ll be back on his feet before you know it.” Her voice carried a calm assurance, though the exhaustion in her eyes betrayed the toll of the past few days.

“Where am I?” I asked, my voice rasping as I tried to piece together my surroundings. My mind was still foggy, struggling to catch up with reality.

“We’re back at HQ,” Gabor replied, though his gaze was distracted, flicking between the activity in the room and something beyond the doorway. The background noise seemed to press in, adding to the growing sense of urgency.

The realization hit me like a jolt. “We need to go now,” I said, my tone urgent as I locked eyes with Dipti. The coalition forces were closing in; we didn’t have much time left. I glanced down at the IV in my arm, the needle embedded in my skin, pushing life-sustaining fluids into my veins. For a moment, I considered ripping it out like in the movies, but the thought of the pain and potential damage stopped me. Instead, I motioned to the nurse, trying to keep my voice steady.

“I need to go. How far away is the coalition from the city?” I asked, my pulse quickening. The words felt heavy, each one laden with the weight of the situation.

The nurse hesitated, her hands pausing as she adjusted the IV. She looked at me, worry etched across her face, the emotions she was trying to hide swirling just beneath the surface. “I’m not sure,” she finally said, her voice low. “But I’ve been listening to other soldiers... the front lines are crumbling. There’ve been multiple breakthroughs on several sectors. The coalition just walked right through Tel Aviv. We continue to fight, though, as many soldiers were in the tunnels of Tel Aviv when the nuke hit, but the sheer number of the enemy allows them to continue their advance.”

A wounded soldier came in, critical. The nurse was distracted and moved to help others administer critical care.

Her words were like a cold splash of reality. My memories came flooding back to me. I remembered the mushroom cloud hovering in the sky in the direction of Tel Aviv after we escaped the ambush in Al Aqsa Mosque. The image was seared into my mind, a grim reminder of the devastation. I couldn’t believe the IDF was still fighting in the tunnels, holding on against impossible odds. A chill ran down my spine at the thought. Their resistance might buy us some time, but how much was uncertain.

“How long was I out?” I asked, the urgency in my voice unmistakable.

“It’s been around ten hours. It’s sixteen hundred right now,” Gabor said, glancing at his watch.

I managed a small smile. “Ahh, you carried me home. How sweet. You’re my hero, Gabor.”

He smiled back, though it was tinged with sarcasm. “Oy, don’t make a big megillah out of it. But, I wouldn’t mind a medal if there’s still a government left after all this.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll give you a medal.”

“What, a donkey’s tail? Because I’m an ass?” He quipped, his eyes narrowing with a playful, self-deprecating grin.

“Shut up, Gabor,” Dipti interjected, her tone both gentle and firm. “Don’t be so hard on yourself. You’re a sinner like everyone else, plus you were drunk. I’ve done some stupid stuff before when I was drunk. Anyway, Levi shot you before you could do anything.”

Gabor raised an eyebrow, his lips twisting into a wry smile. “Nu? I think you’re trying to make me a ba’al teshuva or something.”

“No,” Dipti replied, her expression softening, “You’ll convert yourself.”

Gabor’s gaze softened for a moment, a flicker of vulnerability passing through his eyes before he quickly masked it with a grin. “Listen, Gabor,” Dipti continued, “I think Hashem has an incredible purpose for your life. Your calling for His divine purpose will soon be realized.”

“That’d be something, wouldn’t it? But, honestly, I don’t know what I’m supposed to do now; everything is gone.” His voice wavered, and I knew he was talking about his family.

“They’re in a better place now, Gabor,” Dipti said gently.

Gabor’s tone grew bitter as he responded, “They weren’t Christians. According to your beliefs, they’re in Gehinnom now.”

“We don’t know that,” Dipti replied, her voice steady yet compassionate. “Yeshua is the final judge.”

“Am I going to Gehinnom?” Gabor's voice softened, the bitterness giving way to a quieter, almost childlike vulnerability.

“If you don’t believe, yes.”

“They didn’t believe.”

“Maybe they didn’t know.”

Gabor shook his head, no longer looking at Dipti but instead staring at the ancient stones of our makeshift headquarters. His thoughts seemed far away, lost in the enormity of the question that had been haunting him. The room seemed to grow quieter, the weight of his words hanging heavy in the air.

“My rabbi, oy vey, he’d plotz if I converted,” he muttered, his voice laced with a mix of fear and dark humor. “He’d come up from his grave, scream about chilul Hashem, and tell my family to sit shiva for me. And you know what? They probably would.” He paused for a moment, then looked at me with a resigned expression. “It’s something to think about on our way to the catacombs.”

The urgency of our situation snapped back into focus. “Nurse, I need to go,” I said, my voice firm as I looked at the nurse, who was now fully engaged with the other staff trying to resuscitate a soldier who had gone into shock.

Realizing that time was slipping away, I decided I couldn't wait any longer. My resolve hardened. I took a deep breath, grabbed the bandages that held the IV in place, and began to slowly pull the needle out of my vein, wincing slightly as it slid free. This wasn’t like the movies—there was no dramatic flourish, just the cold, clinical reality of what needed to be done. Dipti was at my side in an instant, helping me out of bed.

A fresh madei bet uniform was waiting for me at the base of my bed. I pulled the pants up underneath my gown and slipped into the top and T-shirt, my movements quick but deliberate. I laced the boots as tight as I could, double-tying them to ensure they would hold.

As I finished, the soldier stabilized, and the nurse turned back, realizing that I was out of bed and ready to go. Her eyes widened in surprise, but a mix of admiration and concern flickered across her face.

“Oy gevalt, what are you doing? You’re not ready for this!” she exclaimed, her hands momentarily hovering in the air as if unsure whether to stop me or let me go. Then, with a deep breath, she seemed to accept the inevitability of my decision. “If you’re going to do this, at least do it right. Hashem be with you, soldier. And remember—sometimes even David needed a little help with Goliath.”

She gave me a small, almost motherly smile, her voice softening. “Go get ’em, soldier, come back in one piece, b’vakasha.”

The squad advanced cautiously through the tunnel, every movement deliberate, every breath measured. The air was thick with the stench of damp stone and stale water, clinging to their skin like a suffocating shroud. Each footstep echoed ominously through the narrow passage; the sound amplified by the tight confines of the tunnel walls. The soldiers instinctively tried to move as lightly as possible, knowing that even the slightest noise could betray their position.

Ngô Thanh, a seasoned Vietnamese soldier who had joined the coalition from the People’s Army of Vietnam, took point. His eyes were narrowed in concentration, scanning the darkness. Behind him, Lieutenant Daniels moved with equal care, his face a mask of grim determination. Just a step behind, Sgt. Hess lingered, his hand never straying far from his sidearm, his eyes flicking between Daniels and the shadows that seemed to press in from all sides.

Raskin, his breath coming in controlled but heavy bursts, carried Lot with the tarp with the help from another soldier. Lot’s breathing was shallow, his skin an ashen gray under the eerie green glow of the NVGs. His life was slipping away, and the squad knew they were racing against time, the mission complicated further by the burden of a dying man.

As they approached a sharp bend in the tunnel, the faint sound of distant voices reached their ears—a murmur at first, but growing steadily louder. Lt. Daniels raised a clenched fist, signaling a halt. The squad froze, instinctively pressing themselves against the cold, damp walls. Raskin instinctively lowered Lot to the ground. Lot was still deliriously murmuring about Mother Mary. Raskin pinched Lot’s lips together so he couldn’t make a sound. The air crackled with tension as they listened, the sound of their own hearts pounding in their ears, louder than the murmur of the approaching voices.

The voices grew clearer, carried on the still, damp air like a warning. They spoke in Hebrew, the language familiar enough to Daniels from his earlier encounters, and he could make out fragments of their conversation—a mixture of complaints about the cold and speculations about the mission ahead. He held up his hand, signaling for silence, and the squad responded with a practiced precision, their bodies coiling like springs ready to unleash.

They moved silently, stacking against the side of the tunnel just before the bend, each man taking up a position with the fluid grace of soldiers who had done this a thousand times before. The oppressive darkness closed in around them, broken only by the flicker of their NVGs, casting everything in a ghostly green hue. Ngô Thanh, his face a mask of calm resolve, slowly pulled a flashbang from his vest, his fingers moving with a quiet efficiency that spoke of years of training and experience.

The Israeli soldiers were now dangerously close, their footsteps echoing off the tunnel walls as they approached. Daniels locked eyes with each of his men, then held up three fingers, his hand steady despite the adrenaline surging through his veins. The countdown began—a silent, lethal rhythm that synchronized with the pounding of their hearts.

Three…

Ngô Thanh’s grip tightened on the flashbang, his body tensing in anticipation.

Two…

The squad braced themselves, weapons at the ready, breaths held.

One…

Daniels dropped his fingers, the final signal.

Ngô Thanh threw the flashbang with a swift, practiced motion, the small canister arcing through the air and disappearing around the bend. For a split second, there was nothing but silence, a breathless pause before the storm. Then, with a deafening blast and a blinding flash of light, the tunnel exploded into chaos.

As the flashbang detonated, the tunnel erupted into a cacophony of sound and light. The disoriented Israeli soldiers, caught off guard by the sudden attack, staggered and stumbled, their hands instinctively reaching for their weapons. But it was too late—Ngô Thanh was already moving with deadly precision, his laser sight cutting through the darkness like a razor. One by one, he took down the Israeli soldiers with swift, efficient shots, each blast echoing off the tunnel walls.

Lieutenant Daniels and the rest of the squad followed closely behind, fanning out as much as the narrow tunnel allowed. The danger of friendly fire was real, but their training kicked in, guiding their movements with a practiced discipline. They moved like a well-oiled machine, each man covering his sector, their weapons trained on the disoriented enemies who struggled to regain their footing.

The Israelis fought back with desperation, their shouts of commands in Hebrew cutting through the noise of the gunfire. But they were no match for the relentless precision of the squad. One by one, they fell, their bodies slumping to the cold, unforgiving ground.

Within moments, the firefight was over. The tunnel fell into a heavy silence, broken only by the distant rumble of collapsing structures and the labored breathing of the squad. The Israeli soldiers lay scattered around them, their weapons clattering to the ground as their lives slipped away.

Daniels lowered his weapon, his chest heaving as he scanned the tunnel for any remaining threats. His eyes flicked to each member of his squad, ensuring they were all accounted for. They were battered and bruised, but alive. For now, that was enough.

"Clear," Daniels muttered, his voice hoarse from the adrenaline that coursed through his veins. The squad began to regroup, their movements slower now, more cautious. But it wasn’t clear. One of the Israeli soldiers, playing dead, quietly pulled the pin from a grenade attached to his vest and threw it in the direction of the squad.

"Grenade!" someone shouted, and in an instant, the squad scrambled, trying to escape its deadly blast radius.

Sgt. Hess moved faster than anyone. He sprinted toward Lieutenant Daniels with a force that seemed almost unnatural, grabbing him and tackling him directly onto the grenade. The two hit the ground hard, and the grenade detonated beneath them with a deafening "DOOF!"

Daniels gasped for breath as the explosion tore through him, the agony spreading like wildfire. His vision swam, the green glow of his NVGs distorting into a nightmare of light and shadow. Hess’s weight pinned him down, but it wasn’t the physical force that crushed Daniels the most—it was the cold, unyielding betrayal in Hess’s eyes. That bond, forged in the crucible of battle, had shattered in an instant.

"Why...?" Daniels whispered, his voice barely a rasp over the pulsing pain. He searched Hess's face for some flicker of remorse, some trace of the brotherhood that had once bound them. But there was nothing. Hess’s expression was unreadable, his eyes deadened, as if he had already left this world for another, colder place.

"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," Hess muttered. The words were hollow, devoid of the fervor that usually accompanied the slogan. His tone was almost robotic, as if he was reciting a fact rather than declaring a belief.

Despair clawed at Daniels, mingling with the anger that flared inside him. He had fought beside this man, trusted him with his life. Now, in this forsaken tunnel, that trust had been twisted into a weapon against him. Hess had chosen his path, and in doing so, had condemned Daniels to this brutal fate.

As the light in Daniels' eyes began to dim, his breaths growing weaker, he could no longer focus on the distorted green glow around him. The pain receded, replaced by an overwhelming numbness. Hess remained motionless; his gaze unwavering as he watched the life drain from his former leader. He didn’t flinch as Daniels' final breath escaped his lips, leaving only silence and the faint echo of the explosion in its wake.

Ngô Thanh, pushing aside the chaos that had just unfolded, moved with practiced efficiency, dispatching the wounded Israeli soldier before he could do further damage. The squad, slowly gathering around Daniels, stared in a mix of shock and confusion, trying to make sense of the scene before them. The air was thick with the acrid stench of burnt flesh, the metallic tang of blood lingering in the back of their throats.

Hess rose to his feet, his movements deliberate and slow. The squad watched him, their eyes wide, their minds reeling. He looked around at his comrades, the mask of determination still firmly in place. But something had changed. Hess was no longer the hardened veteran they had known—he had become something else entirely. A dark high priest, issuing commands from a god they didn’t know but one he had now embraced with chilling certainty.

Hess’s voice cut through the heavy silence, cold and resonant like a preacher delivering a sermon. "This man betrayed all of you," he began, his words calculated, almost ritualistic. "We came here for a purpose—to liberate the Palestinians. But this man wanted to fight against the cause that brought us together."

His gaze swept over the squad, his eyes piercing through the lingering haze. "Make no mistake, I’ll do the same to any of you who put the great cause of humanity in jeopardy. You will give your heart, mind, and soul to me and to the great leaders who have united us. You no longer belong to yourselves; you are appendages bound to the heart of the living spirit of man."

The squad stood frozen, unsure of how to react to Hess’ stunning declaration. Some stood quiet, afraid to even affirm the convictions of Hess even if they shared his twisted worldview. Others like Ngô Thanh responded enthusiastically embracing Hess’s words like they were their own,

“Fucking amazing, Sgt. Hess. Hoaahh! I’m with you.”

The oppressive darkness of the tunnel had become even darker as if the darkness inside Hess had further spread and consumed any remaining light within. They had seen men break under the strain of war, but this was different. Hess had transformed before their eyes—no longer a comrade but a fanatic, a zealot whose convictions were more terrifying than the enemy they had just faced. The realization sank in like a blade—there was no going back. They were now bound to Hess, their fates tied to his twisted vision of liberation, and there was no escaping the grim reality that lay ahead.

Raskin knelt down beside Lot. He removed his NVGs and used a small flashlight to examine him. His fingers trembled as they hovered over the man’s wounds. Lot was still conscious, his breathing shallow but steady. The dim light flickered across his pale face, and his eyes, though weary, still held a spark of life. He motioned for Raskin to lean closer.

"Rescue me from this madness," Lot whispered, his voice a fragile thread. The words hung in the air, a desperate plea that cut through the chaos surrounding them.

Raskin nodded silently, his throat tight with emotion. He had always known war to be a brutal, unforgiving force, but this… this was something different. For the first time, he recognized it as something more than just a hollow pursuit of power. There was a darkness here, a malevolence that went beyond the physical horrors of battle. It was deeply satanic, a corruption that gnawed at the very fabric of his soul.

In that moment, something within Raskin shifted. A profound sense of the spiritual awakened inside him—not from any religious epiphany, but from the sheer presence of an evil so overwhelming that it defied words. It was as if a veil had been lifted, revealing the true nature of this war—a conflict not just of nations or ideologies, but of something far darker, something that threatened to consume them all.

And then, amid the chaos, a realization struck him with undeniable force: his mother's faith, once dismissed as distant and abstract, was all too real now. The teachings she had tried to impart, the stories of good and evil, of Jesus and Satan—they were no longer just symbols or metaphors. They were truth.

Raskin couldn’t explain how or why it had happened, but the clarity of it was unmistakable. In the depths of this forsaken place, surrounded by madness and malevolence, he found himself changed. He was no longer the man who had entered this war. Unknowingly, unwittingly, he had become a Christian.

# Chapter 12

The IDF had held the line for two days. On the third, everything fell apart. The front crumbled under multiple breakthroughs from the north and west, leaving the Israeli forces scattered. Their attempts at hit-and-run tactics were useless against a sea of coalition soldiers that swarmed the nation like locusts. There was no place to run, no place to hide. And yet, Levi and Dipti clung to hope—if not for survival, then for divine intervention.

As they prepared to retreat to the catacombs, they scavenged whatever supplies they could carry. The bodies of fallen soldiers lay scattered in the makeshift headquarters, their sacrifice for a war they could not win. The distant hum of battle had faded to a low rumble, but it was a sound that drove them forward, each step heavier with urgency.

The ancient stone slabs groaned as Levi pried them open, revealing a narrow entrance that plunged into darkness. Cold, stale air seeped out, carrying the scent of earth and decay. Levi crouched low, slipping inside first, disappearing into the blackness. Dipti followed, her movements hurried, almost frantic, while Gabor lingered at the entrance. He cast a final, lingering glance at the smoke rising from the city he’d called home for the past year before lowering himself into the tomb.

Inside the catacombs, the air felt thick and oppressive, the narrow passageways pressing in on them from all sides. As they settled into their hiding place, Levi's fingers brushed against the cold, rough stone of a burial niche. Despite the grim surroundings, he remained calm, his faith unshaken. He believed that divine sovereignty was at work, guiding them even in this desperate situation. Yet, uncertainty lingered—he prayed constantly, seeking to uncover how their deliverance would unfold.

Beside him, Dipti sat with her eyes closed, her lips moving in silent prayer. She sought divine protection, yet Levi couldn't shake the lingering doubt—was anyone truly listening?

Gabor, crammed into his own tight space, shifted uncomfortably. When he finally spoke, his voice was barely a whisper. "How long do we wait here, Levi? They’ll find us eventually."

Levi didn’t respond immediately. The question gnawed at him, the silence in the tombs amplifying his doubts. His faith had always been strong, but here, surrounded by death and darkness, it felt fragile. He drew in a slow breath, trying to steady himself.

“Maybe,” Levi finally replied, his voice low, as much for his own reassurance as for Gabor’s. “Maybe they’ll pass us by. This place… it’s old. Sacred. They might avoid it.”

Gabor’s snort was soft, bitter. “Sacred ground didn’t stop them from burning synagogues in the north. I’m not betting my life on superstition.” He shifted again, pulling two knives and handguns from his rucksack. Carefully, he handed them to Levi, their movements slow and deliberate in the tight space.

Dipti’s eyes opened, her voice cutting through the tension. “Because we’re here. God is with us, even now. He won’t abandon us.”

Levi wanted to believe her. He needed to believe her. But the weight of doubt pressed down on him, threatening to suffocate the fragile hope he held onto.

Suddenly, the murmur of soldiers’ voices echoed through the catacombs, growing louder, closer. The faint metallic clatter of armor sent a jolt of fear through Levi’s veins. They froze, every sound magnified in the silence. Each breath felt like a betrayal. The soldiers’ footsteps slowed, and for a heart-stopping moment, Levi thought they’d been found. He could hear them discussing the tombs, debating whether to search or move on.

Time stretched painfully. Then, gradually, the voices began to fade as the soldiers decided the catacombs weren’t worth their time.

Levi exhaled slowly, releasing the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. They had been spared, at least for now. Dipti’s quiet prayer of thanks was barely audible, but it resonated in the tomb’s silence.

But relief was fleeting. Levi knew they couldn’t stay hidden forever. The enemy might return, and the tombs would only shield them for so long. They needed a new plan.

He turned to the others; his voice quiet but firm. “Tomorrow, Hashem will deliver us. Gabor and I will move to the Mount of Olives in the morning and wait for Him there. Dipti, you must stay here.”

Dipti’s protest was immediate. “Are you crazy? I’m not staying here with a bunch of dead men’s bones.”

Levi forced a smirk, though his heart wasn’t in it. “Oh, come on. It’s no different than spending the night at your parents’ home.”

A reluctant smile tugged at Dipti’s lips, but it was brief. “You’ll draw attention if I’m seen with you. You don’t realize what’s happening out there. They’re raping and pillaging the entire city. You stay here, and that’s final.”

Dipti sighed, her resistance crumbling. “Fine. But the supplies stay with me. I’m really enjoying these Israeli MREs.”

The weight of the moment lifted slightly as Dipti tore open the packet of chocolate from her MRE, savoring the rich taste as if it could shield her from the chaos beyond the tomb. "If life gives you lemons, then eat chocolate," she muttered, the dark humor a small act of defiance in the face of terror.

Gabor and Levi followed her lead, each pulling out their own MREs. Gabor chewed on a piece of halva, its sweetness a stark contrast to the bitter reality they faced. Levi quietly unwrapped a packet of dried fruit, the familiar taste grounding him, if only for a moment. The tension in the air eased, if just slightly, as they shared this small, mundane ritual—a brief flicker of normalcy amid the storm that surrounded them.

Gabor looked up, a thought that was gnawing him.

“You said Hashem is going to deliver us tomorrow. What do you mean?”

“You packed knives and guns, but I brought something just as dangerous,” Levi then took out a Torah that he had pried from the hands of a deceased soldier at the makeshift headquarters. That man, who cried for his mother as he passed away, gripped the holy book with hope even until death. Levi began reading from Zechariah chapter 14 and Ezekiel chapter 38 all that would come to pass. Once the enemy had raped and pillaged Jerusalem the Lord himself will come out and fight for them. This would all begin from Mount Olives.

“So, you see, I firmly believe this will all begin tomorrow. Our deliverance is near, God is going to rescue us.”

"I’ll come with you, Tsadik." Gabor’s gaze fixed on Levi, memories flooding his mind—how Levi had spoken of events before they happened, how his prayers had brought peace when all seemed lost. He had tried to dismiss it, chalking it up to coincidence. But now, as Levi recited the ancient prophecies, Gabor felt a stirring deep within him. "I’ve always known there was something different about you," he whispered, his voice heavy with realization. "You’re not like other men. I think… I think you might be the Moshiach."

"No, Gabor. I’m Elijah. The one you seek will come to his temple, and he will refine you with a refiner’s fire. The day of his coming, who can endure? Only his elect."

The metal bars leading to the surface loomed before them, a gateway to uncertainty. The squad knew they had little time before the firefight they had just survived would attract other IDF units. With most of their ammunition spent and their minds reeling from the sight of their division being nuked and their company commander fragged, they were in no shape for another encounter.

Sgt. Hess scanned the remaining survivors, taking in their defeated expressions. All of them appeared broken, except for Raskin. Something in Raskin’s demeanor had shifted, and it unsettled Hess in a way he couldn't quite articulate.

"Raskin," Hess barked, his voice cutting through the oppressive silence. "Suit up. You're going topside. Look for a convoy or anything we can use for transport. If you spot one of our birds, use this to flag them down." He thrust a flare gun into Raskin’s hands.

Raskin nodded, his face lit up. He was more than happy to be able to escape the tunnel even if it meant going to the surface and dying from radiation. He put on his gas mask, blowing and then sucking the air from one part of the mask to another sealing it on his face. He then methodically sealed himself into his NBC gear. His movements were deliberate, almost robotic, as he slipped his feet into the protective boots, feeling the sweat pooling at the soles. The ladder felt cold and unforgiving under his gloved hands as he ascended, each rung a reminder of the precariousness of their situation. He moved carefully, aware that one misstep could send him tumbling back into the depths below, where despair and desperation were suffocating them all.

Raskin gritted his teeth as he tried to push the cover blocking the tunnel's exit. It budged slightly, but the debris above it pressed down with relentless weight. He would need more force. The fear of slipping gnawed at him, making his heart pound in his ears. Bracing himself, he climbed as close to the cover as possible, his muscles straining. With a deep breath, he summoned all his strength, pushing with his legs, channeling the force into his core, and driving it upward through his left arm, which was bent and trembling under the pressure. The cover shifted, and the debris gave way—but at that moment, his foot slipped.

He dangled by one hand, his grip on the ladder precarious as his feet scrambled for purchase. The ladder felt slick beneath his protective boots, and every attempt to find traction seemed futile. Panic surged through him as his grip weakened. He gritted his teeth, forcing himself to try one more time. His boots finally caught on the ladder's rungs, and with a desperate surge of strength, he hauled himself back up, removing the cover and crawling out into the open air.

What greeted him was a nightmare. Tel Aviv, once a vibrant city, had been reduced to a desolate wasteland. The sky, now a sickly orange-gray, was choked with clouds of dust and ash, casting an eerie twilight over the ruins. The air was thick with radiation, and every breath felt like inhaling death. An unnatural silence smothered the city, broken only by the crackle of distant fires and the groan of collapsing buildings.

The streets, once alive with people and traffic, were buried under a sea of rubble. The buildings that had once soared proudly into the sky were now twisted, charred skeletons of steel and concrete, some still smoldering from the blast. Cars lay overturned or stacked haphazardly, scorched by the inferno. There was no sign of life—no people, no animals. Just the haunting remains of a city that had once thrived, now nothing more than a grim testament to destruction.

In the distance, Raskin spotted a massive crater where the heart of the city used to be, its edges glowing faintly from residual heat. The sight was overwhelming, a stark reminder of the devastation that had befallen them. As he scanned the horizon, he catched a glimpse of movement—a convoy of military vehicles, barely visible through the haze, made its way slowly through the ruins. It was unclear if they were friend or foe, but they were the only chance of survival for the squad.

Raskin took a deep breath, the filtered air through his gas mask feeling strangely insufficient. He prepared to signal the convoy with the flare gun, his heart pounding in his chest. The flare rose up in the orange-gray sky, the illumination it gave was a reddish bronze. A couple vehicles broke off from the main convoy and started heading their way.

Raskin steadied himself, gripping the flare gun tightly as the MRAP halted before him.

“We suppose you’re with the coalition and want a ride. Can you identify yourself?”

The cold, metallic voice from a speaker sent a shiver down his spine. He could see the figures inside the vehicle, their silhouettes barely visible through the armored glass. His mind raced, but he forced himself to stay calm.

“Cpl Raskin, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment,” he replied, his voice slightly muffled by the gas mask. He hoped they could hear him clearly. His eyes darted to the emblem on the side of the MRAP, he recognized the green four-leaf clover emblem of the fourth infantry division and breathed a slight relief. They were the colored unit in the rear which had pulled out before Tel Aviv got nuked.

There was a brief pause, and Raskin's heart pounded louder in his chest. Each second felt like an eternity.

“ID confirmed,” the voice crackled back through the radio. “What’s your unit’s situation?”

Raskin exhaled in relief. “There are six of us left. One's wounded and needs immediate medical attention. We’re completely out of ammunition. We need extraction, now.”

“Understood. Get everyone topside. We’ll get you out of here,” the voice replied, distorted by static.

Raskin sprinted to the hole and shouted as loud as he could through his gas mask, his voice echoing down the shaft. Sgt. Hess shouted something back, muffled but clear enough—he and the others were on their way. One by one, the men climbed up the ladder, exhaustion etched into their faces. Sgt. Hess was the last to emerge.

“Ask if they’ve got a rope. We need to lift Lot,” Hess said, his voice hoarse but commanding.

Raskin approached the MRAP and relayed the request. The reply was immediate and cold. “Negative. No rope. Put your leader on.”

Raskin turned and motioned to Hess. “They want you, Sergeant.”

Hess approached, his expression unreadable. "I’m Sgt. Hess. What do you need?"

The voice on the other end hesitated before speaking. "I regret to inform you, Sergeant, that none of you were supposed to survive that blast. The official line is that the Israelis blew up their own city to try to stop us. There can’t be any survivors to contradict that story—but we know the truth."

Hess's smile was sharp and humorless. "So, you’re gonna kill us?"

"No," the voice replied, almost conspiratorially. "We’re going to pretend to kill you. Eyes are on us, but my buddy in Bravo Company is going to help you out. He knows your location. He’ll bring extra uniforms and get you suited up. After that, he’ll take you to a decontamination facility on the way to Jerusalem. You’ll be ghosts—officially dead."

Hess studied the MRAP, his mind racing. "And you expect us to trust you?"

The voice paused before responding. "It’s that, or we kill you for real, Sergeant. Your call."

Hess nodded slowly. "Roger that. So, what do you want us to do?"

"We’re going to drive away. On the way, the turret will turn and fire over your heads. You better drop like you’re dead when it happens, or command will come and check your bodies. Tell your team, and make sure they’re tracking before we execute. Understood?"

Hess sprinted back to the squad and explained the situation. The soldiers reacted with disbelief—after everything they’d been through, now they had to play dead. And Lot still needed immediate medical attention.

The MRAP’s engine roared to life, lurching forward. As it began to drive away, the turret rotated smoothly and fired several bursts over their heads. Raskin and the squad dropped to the ground, their hearts pounding.

Ngo, ever the joker, shouted, his Vietnamese accent thick with mock drama, "Oh, they hit me!"

Sgt. Hess shot back, "Shut the fuck up and play dead like a good little grunt."

Time crawled by as Raskin lay motionless in the nuclear wasteland, pretending to be dead. The oppressive silence was broken only by the distant crackle of fires and the occasional creak of collapsing structures. Every passing second fed his growing fear—what if the fallout was already seeping into his body, poisoning him slowly? He imagined himself developing cancer at a young age, dying an early death, even if he survived this nightmare.

His thoughts drifted to Lot. How was he holding up? The urge to get up and call out to him down the tunnel gnawed at him, but he knew better. What if no one came for them? Were they going to die here, forgotten in the ruins?

Bitterness welled up inside him as he thought of Sgt. Hess and his so-called grand cause to liberate the Palestinians. Hess had sacrificed Lt. Daniels for that cause—had rationalized murder in the name of a higher purpose. And now, here they were, about to be sacrificed themselves by the very leaders Hess had so faithfully served. They were expendable, just another appendage of the unified humanity that no longer had a use and needed to be amputated for the greater good. Right, Hess?

Raskin wanted to shout it out loud, to mock the cruel irony of it all, but he bit his tongue. What if they survived this? He hadn’t entirely given up on hope—not yet. But right now, hope felt fragile, and the greatest threat to it wasn’t the radiation or the remnants of the IDF putting up a fight—it was Sgt. Hess. Hess posed a greater danger to Raskin’s survival than anything else, with his ruthless pragmatism and willingness to sacrifice anyone for his cause.

If only Raskin could report Hess to his superiors, expose the murder of Lt. Daniels, and see Hess face justice. But now, they were officially dead—erased from the world. There was no one left to hear about the atrocity that took place in that tunnel, no human ear to listen to his cries for justice.

In his despair, Raskin turned to the only power he had left. Silently, he pleaded his cause to Almighty God, praying for swift and righteous judgment on Sgt. Hess. If there was justice left in the world, surely it would come from above.

Ngo shouted, “Hey, you hear that!”

Raskin focused his mind, listening intently for anything that might sound like a vehicle. Yes, yes, he could hear it—the slight but sure rattle of an engine in the distance. The soldier was true to his word. The MRAP pulled alongside them. The door to the back of the vehicle popped open, and a soldier quickly ran outside.

“Where’s the soldier that needs medical attention?”

“He’s down in the tunnel. Go fast—I’ll go with you,” said Raskin, ready to help his buddy out if he was still alive.

“The rest of you, get inside the MRAP. Tear off your uniforms and put them inside the black plastic bag.”

The soldier grabbed the end of the winch cable from the MRAP and a stretcher. “We’re going to strap him down to the stretcher and then attach the winch and pull him out.”

“I’m tracking. Let’s go.”

Raskin sprinted back to the tunnel, heart pounding with a mix of hope and dread. He clambered down the ladder as quickly as his protective gear allowed, the other soldier close behind. Together, they guided the stretcher through the shaft. When they reached the bottom, instinct prompted Raskin to put on his NVGs. He scanned the dimly lit space, searching for Lot. The wounded soldier lay motionless, his breathing shallow and labored. Raskin could feel his own pulse quicken—Lot didn't look good.

They sealed him up in NBC gear, strapped him down to the stretcher, and latched the winch cable. As the soldier was about to give the order through his radio to lift Lot, Raskin caught sight of something terrifying—red laser beams cutting through the darkness further down the tunnel. The enemy was coming.

“Wait,” Raskin whispered. “The enemy is coming. They might hear us and shoot up the shaft.” He handed his NVGs to the soldier.

“Shit.” The soldier radioed to begin pulling Lot. “You guide him up. I’ll stay here and give you time. Remember this, soldier—we’re not all racist motherfuckers. Your skin is white, but you still bleed red like I do. Now go.”

Raskin did as he was commanded. Once he was fully in the shaft, the soldier looked up at him with a determined expression, holding a grenade tightly in his hand. His eyes gleamed with a fierce resolve. "For the first!" he shouted, pulling the pin with a sharp, metallic click.

The grenade sailed through the air in a perfect arc, disappearing into the darkness below. For a heartbeat, there was nothing but silence. Then, a deafening BOOM shattered the quiet, followed by a violent shockwave that reverberated through the tunnel walls. Dust and debris exploded upward, illuminated by a flash of blinding light that illuminated the tunnel in a burst of orange and yellow. The explosion reverberated through the shaft, a violent shockwave that sent dust and debris flying in all directions. The force of the blast seemed to compress the very air, momentarily snuffing out every other sound. Then came the chaos—a cacophony of screams, shouts, and panicked gunfire as the Israeli soldiers scrambled in confusion, their night vision shattered by the blast. The grenade had done its job, sowing terror and disarray in the enemy ranks.

Raskin barely flinched as the echoes of the explosion faded. He kept his focus, guiding Lot up the shaft with steady hands, occasionally glancing down to make sure the Israelis weren’t closing in. Halfway up, he took a deep breath and sealed his gas mask tightly, knowing they had little time left.

Once they reached the surface, Raskin detached the winch with a practiced motion. Ngo was already there, waiting, and together they dragged Lot to the waiting MRAP. Their muscles strained with exhaustion, but they pushed through, lifting Lot’s limp body into the vehicle with all the strength they had left.

Inside the MRAP, the harsh reality of their situation hit them. They tore off their NBC gear with frantic urgency, tossing the contaminated clothing into decontamination bags. Their skin prickled with the memory of the radioactive dust that had clung to their suits, and a sense of dread gnawed at the edges of their minds.

Decontamination wipes were passed around—a poor substitute for a proper decon shower, but it was all they had. Raskin scrubbed at his skin with the coarse, chemical-soaked cloth, feeling the burn as the chemicals stripped away any lingering particles of radiation. He worked methodically, wiping down every exposed inch of his body, his movements precise yet hurried. The sharp smell of the decon wipes filled the confined space of the MRAP, mixing with the scent of sweat and fear.

Turning his attention to Lot, Raskin carefully unstrapped him from the stretcher. The soldier’s breathing was shallow, but steady. Raskin slowly peeled away Lot’s NBC suit, mindful of the wound, his hands moving with a gentleness that belied the chaos outside. Every piece of contaminated gear was handled with care, each motion deliberate to prevent further exposure.

As Raskin finished, a voice crackled through a speaker above them, cold and detached. “Don’t worry, boys. We’ll get you to the nearest decontamination facility. But remember—don’t tell anyone you were in the first. I’ll be with you along the way to make sure nobody tries to identify you. Your names are the ones located on the uniforms in the plastic bags. Take one and see if it fits.”

The reality of their new identities began to sink in as Raskin reached for a uniform, his fingers trembling slightly. They were ghosts now, erased from the world they once knew.