

CHAPTER 1



“*W*hat was that?” Fahid said. The sudden noise in the dark tunnel behind him made the hair on the back of his neck bristle. Was somebody else there—or *something*?

Hisham slowed to a stop. “What?”

Fahid put his finger to his lips and listened. He could have sworn he’d heard the shuffle of feet, but now his ears only detected the distant drip of water. Was his mind playing tricks on him?

Hisham aimed the beam of his flashlight, tracing the electric cables that ran down the cement ceiling and casting long, eerie shadows along the endless gray walls.

He bared his teeth. “Scared of ghosts?”

“I’m not scared,” Fahid lied. He still slept with a nightlight in the room he shared with his two older brothers, but he would never admit that to his friend.

“We’re under the Enemy’s feet now,” he added. “What if they’ve found the tunnel?”

For months the two boys had shoveled dirt, mixed cement,

and plastered the tunnel walls. In return, they received a hamper of Hershey's chocolate bars every other week. The tunnel started in a storage room beneath the UNRWA Hospital in Gaza City and wormed its way beneath houses and apartment buildings, crossing the immense border wall, and ending in an empty field at the outskirts of two Israeli farming villages.

Their work was not without danger. Fahid had lost two school friends to collapsing ceilings. Another had drowned when the Egyptians pumped sea water into a tunnel near the Rafah Border Crossing. Their own tunnel had surfaced in enemy territory two days ago, and now the threat of detonation by the Israel Defense Forces haunted their every step. If enemy soldiers had slipped into the tunnel behind them, they would cut off the boys from escape.

"They haven't found it," Hisham said. "C'mon. Let's finish up and go home."

They had to complete their survey by dawn so that tonight, the Arab fighters with their heavy packs would not trip on loose stones or slip in puddles. Such mishaps might detonate their bombs or trigger machine gun fire, killing their comrades underground and alerting the Enemy.

Faster, the boys pressed onward.

Uuungghh...

A low moan issued from the darkness behind them, the sound of an injured animal. A wolf?

The boys halted, and Fahid gripped Hisham by the elbow. This time, Hisham didn't mock him for being scared. His eyes were large and white; he had heard it too.

Hisham grabbed him by the shirt. "Is this a trick? Are you messing with me?"

"No. I swear it! Turn on the lights."

"We're not allowed to, remember? The current makes the tunnel easier to find."

The groan rose behind them again. A second voice joined the first; then a third. Not a lone wolf but a pack of suffering creatures. The voices sounded almost human—humans unlike any Fahid had ever encountered.

“What if it’s *them*?” Fahid hissed.

“Who?” Hisham knew exactly what Fahid meant. Everyone had heard the stories even if they refused to talk about them.

Fahid swallowed his pride. “The Dead Jews.”

“Those are lies,” his friend said. “Lies told by the Enemy to plant fear in our hearts. The dead do not rise, certainly not dead Jews.”

“But they do. They sprout from the ground, and now they rule the Zionist Enemy!”

“Nonsense!” Hisham said, but his arm trembled.

Mnnnnngggrrrrhhhh....

Hisham clutched Fahid’s arm too. The groaning came louder now, closer. There was a scraping sound as well, the shuffling of a hundred feet over the rough tunnel floor toward them.

Hisham swore and waved the beam of the flashlight behind them. Fifty meters back, the tunnel turned a corner and disappeared.

“Come on,” he said, and he pushed forward.

Fahid kept up with him, glancing back every few steps at the darkness.

The moaning continued. The boys quickened their pace, then broke into a desperate sprint. They ran and ran until they met the solid stone wall at the end of the tunnel. They turned around and pressed their backs against the wall. The flashlight beam faded into the dark. The unseen creatures were worse than any night monster Fahid had ever imagined.

Unnnngggrrrrhhhh...

The voices grew louder, ghoulish voices from the murky realms beyond This World. Hisham aimed his beam, which cut

the black void like a laser but didn't extend far enough. He swore again and hit the switch at the end of the electric cable. Their eyes shuttered as fluorescent strips sizzled to life and white light flooded the tunnel.

Silence. Empty, blessed silence. No groans. No footfalls. Hisham exhaled a deep breath. Fahid did the same. They chuckled. But not for long.

Unnnngggrrrrhhh!

The shuffling started again, faster and more urgent. The bright light had not dispelled the terrors beneath the ground.

Fahid's hand found Hisham's, which was cold and wet. Hisham did not shake him off.

"The ladder," Fahid muttered. They had hammered steel rungs into the rock wall of the shaft above them. Breaching the surface would expose the tunnel to the Israeli enemy, but anything was better than facing the monsters at their heels.

Hisham stared ahead but said nothing. Moments later, Fahid saw why and he wished his friend had not turned on the lights.

The first figure to round the corner of the tunnel had long gray hair, matted with dirt. The dead man's head lolled from side to side, his eyeballs rolling in deep sockets. His naked body was wrinkled and grimy, and his arms swung as unnatural forces dragged his feet forward.

Hisham squeezed Fahid's hand so hard it hurt. A second ghoul trudged behind the first. Then a third followed, a woman. A dozen more marched behind them. The army of the dead grew so thick, Fahid could no longer tell them apart. Young and old. Men and women. The mass of lumbering limbs closed in on them, slow but determined and unstoppable. Their groans echoed off the plastered walls, becoming a deafening roar of otherworldly misery. Deep below the ground, the boys shuddered, trapped between a horde of Dead Jews and the Zionist Enemy.

When the monsters stepped within reach, Hisham snapped out of their petrifying spell.

“Up!” he cried. “Now!” He gripped the first of the steel rungs and scrambled upward into the tall shaft.

Fahid followed, his dusty sneakers slipping on the smooth rungs as he climbed upward away from the groping hands of the undead. Then he collided with Hisham’s legs and his ascent halted.

“Keep going!”

“I can’t. The hatch is locked!”

Below Fahid, the Gray Ghoul ogled the first rung with glazed eyes. They were unnatural, mindless monsters; they couldn’t climb a ladder, could they? As if in answer to Fahid’s unspoken question, the ghoul gripped the steel, gave the rung a tentative pull, and heaved his body upward. Behind him, more Dead Jews followed.

“They’re climbing the ladder!”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“Break it open!”

Hisham banged the base of his flashlight against the handle of the hatch. Nothing happened. He banged again and again, and yet again, until finally there came a metallic *crack*. A draft of cool air ruffled Fahid’s hair, and Hisham launched upward.

Fahid raced after, clambering into the night and rolling onto the dirt and patchy grass. The full moon bathed them in pale light.

Hisham slammed the hatch shut. “C’mon!” He pulled Fahid to his feet. “Over there.” He pointed to a clump of yellow lights a few hundred meters away.

“That’s the Enemy!” Fahid protested. Moments ago, the Israeli village, with its schools and kindergartens, greenhouses and factories, had been their target.

“Rather them than those things down there!” Hisham dragged him forward and Fahid relented.

They sprinted in the night, crossing half the distance to the village before slowing. Crickets chirped in the night as they panted. Fahid's legs burned, the chill air searing his throat and lungs. They paused to catch their breath and smiled at each other in the dull light. They had escaped the monsters.

Then the hatch swung open, and the boys spun around. The Gray Ghoul climbed out of the tunnel and lumbered after them.

Letting out a cry, the boys dashed toward the yellow lights of the nearest village. The groans rose behind them, piercing the night like icy daggers.

Fahid sprinted for all he was worth. Then he crashed into Hisham, and they tumbled to the ground. Fahid got to his elbows and saw why his friend had stopped. A half-dozen bushes formed a semicircle around them. Their camouflaged legs ended in heavy black boots. Beneath their leaves, the barrels of machine guns glinted in the moonlight.

"Stop or I'll shoot," said one bush, in Arabic.

They had run straight into a trap. The boys stared at the commandos, their muscles twitching, the groans behind them growing louder, as did the shuffling feet.

Fahid cringed and clamped his eyes shut. Any moment, the cold claws of the Dead would dig into his shoulders, their sharp teeth into his neck. Or bullets would rip through his body, shredding his flesh and shattering his bones.

But five terrifying seconds later, Fahid still lay there, alive and whole. The groaning had settled; the footfalls ceased. An early morning breeze blew on his damp, sweaty clothes, and an unearthly silence reigned. He opened one eye, then another. The gunmen were no longer looking at him and Hashim, but beyond, their mouths open.

He exchanged a fearful glance with Hisham, and, very slowly, they turned around.

Instead of otherworldly ghouls, men and women shivered in the breaking dawn, pressing their arms over their naked bodies.

Their backs had straightened, and they looked about with surprise and confusion, as though they had woken up in an unfamiliar place.

The Gray Ghoul blinked at them and cleared his throat. “Excuse me,” he said, in Hebrew. “Are we in Heaven?”

CHAPTER 2



Wednesday morning, Prime Minister Moshe Karlin prepared to do what no person in his position would ever do. Well, no *sane* person.

He strode down a hallway inside the Knesset building, the seat of the Israeli Parliament, his two trusted advisors in tow. When he reached the designated conference room his hand hesitated on the handle. The group of oily politicians behind the door hungered to see him fail, and his proposition would weaken his new government. Was he making a mistake?

“Are you sure about this?” said Shmuel. The balding former reporter and current Minister of Foreign Affairs had come to know him very well over the past months.

Was he sure? Moshe had not even wanted this job. And he’d made mistakes before.

He’d been a workaholic in his first life. In his drive to expand his family business, he had neglected his wife, Galit, and his daughter, Talya, and almost lost them both.

Since waking up in the Mount of Olives Cemetery five months ago, he had learned his lesson but then discovered a new obsession. With his newfound popular support, he’d fix society.