

Protector (Golem)

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EXT. WAR ZONE - DAY

Distant bombs EXPLODE. A siren WAILS.

SUPER: Gaza: Khan Younis

Tires screech - dust puffs up from treads. Blending with smoke, it obscures a bombed, decapitated structure.

The bottom half of the building's been somewhat spared - a fractured front door hangs by a hinge.

Two medics leap from a red and white dented van - a red crescent logo on the side:

BULOS (20s, Arabic features)

JASON (30s, European looking - light skin).

Yanking out gear, Bulos tosses a MED KIT to Jason.

They squint towards the horizon. In the distance, barely seen vehicles lumber along.

JASON
Is that... a tank?

Bulos shrugs. The cry of a CHILD makes both men spin around.

They race towards the structure. Nervously glancing at fragile beams overhead, they find a way to slip inside.

INT. COLLAPSED ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dark. Dusty. A scene from Hell. Bulos runs to a body. Lifting one plank reveals - a crushed head. The medic gags.

BULOS
We can't help here.

Jason plays a flashlight over pools of blood.

JASON
This can't all be from him. We heard a kid.

BULOS
A friend in Dier al-Balah told me; drones "cry" sometimes, too.

The two exchange nervous looks, interrupted by: A SOB from under beams.

Approaching the heap like a deadly Jenga stack, Bulos and Jason peel stones away, revealing:

MARWAN (6, Palestinian). Eyes wide, he's bloody, curled in a ball.

BULOS

Ahlan?

(English subtitle)

Hello?

Jason reaches an arm in towards the boy. Marwan flinches:

MARWAN

La!

(English subtitle)

No!

A small smile from Bulos, towards Jason:

BULOS

I'll handle this one, friend.

(to Marwan in Arabic)

Darling, what is your name?

MARWAN

Marwan.

Marwan whimpers, points to his leg. Blood soaks the boy's jeans. Jason runs a hand along one beam.

JASON

Get him to crawl out. Slowly.

Marwan stares at Jason - panicked.

MARWAN

No. Outside is dangerous!!

JASON

(to Marwan)

You.. speak English?

BULOS

Marwan, we'll protect you. Come.

Though shivering, Marwan does as he's told.

As he exits the pocket of rubble, the foot of his wounded leg brushes a strut. Sheet rock crashes down!

Marwan grabs the first thing he can reach. Jason's leg.

White dust billows. Coughing, Jason looks down. Marwan's made it out. A second more, the boy would have been crushed.

Bulos squats down. Examining Marwan's leg, he whistles.

BULOS
A compound fracture.
(to Jason)
You're better with such things.

Marwan shakes his head "no". Scrambles over to Bulos - hugs him instead. Jason chuckles grimly.

JASON
C'mon. I'm not *that* bad.

Bulos reaches for Marwan. The boy flinches back.

MARWAN
Where's Papa?

Looking around Bulos' legs, he sees: The body with the crushed head. Screams. Jason pales, knows what that means.

JASON
Oh God. Don't look -

Marwan tries to run towards his father's corpse. The boy crumples, cries in pain and grief.

Jason hugs him, the boy flails.

BULOS
I'll get a sedative from the truck.

Marwan tries to stand. Jason pins him down.

JASON
Please - you'll hurt your leg worse!

Bulos ducks out what's left of the door.

Bullets RATTLE. An unseen Bulos SCREAMS.

Jason releases Marwan - runs to see. Before he reaches the exit... An EXPLOSION knocks him off his feet!

Sheetrock from the second floor buckles. Jason dives on Marwan, shields the boy.

Rubble falls. Obscures everything.

SECONDS LATER

Jason blinks. Looks around. Miraculously, not much of the structure's changed. In his arms, Marwan sobs.

JASON
Something exploded. *Not* us?

That's a question to himself, not the boy.

Jason tries to stand - YELPS. An iron POLE juts from his ribs; penetrates his side four inches.

JASON
Fuck.

Stifling a scream, Jason grabs the pole. PULLS. CLANG. The iron drops to the floor. Face white, he pivots to Marwan.

JASON
Kid, stay put. I need to find my friend.

Crawling, he inches to the door... peers out:

The van is DESTROYED.

Nearby: Bulos' corpse. Double-tapped to his head and chest.

Pfffffft! A BULLET splinters the frame by Jason's face!

Jason slams the half-destroyed door closed. PFFFT. Another bullet PUNCTURES the wood.

The medic yelps, falls on his butt. Snagging Marwan's collar, he drags the kid away from the door.

Marwan tries to scramble away. Jason holds tight, whispers.

JASON
Shhh. Let 'em think we're gone.

He eyes Marwan's leg.

JASON
Trust me, and I'll clean that wound.

Jason's eyes drift across the room to Bulos' med kit.

JASON
Fine. Challenge accepted.

A wary glance at the door. Due to the bullet's damage, only the bottom three feet remains intact.

Jason belly crawls towards the med kit. Makes sure to not raise his head.

Belly crawls back to Marwan.

Marwan breathes rapidly. Leaning against him, Jason raises his own shirt... examines the wound at his waist.

JASON

Yowch. I could really use help.

Realization. Jason fishes his CELL from his pocket.

Deflates when he sees the shattered screen. Though able to pull up Contacts, it won't dial. Jason shakes it. Growls.

Marwan perks up a little - curious.

JASON

People are still gonna come looking for us. No big?

Jason focuses Marwan's leg. Cutting away denim, he treats the wound as best he can. Marwan resists.

JASON

This'll make you feel better. Pinkie swear.

As Jason leans over the boy, a SILVER STAR OF DAVID NECKLACE slips from his shirt.

Seeing it, the boy squirms. Jason fumbles to tuck it away, but Marwan's seen enough. Fear sets in.

MARWAN

(in Arabic)
Soldier!

JASON

Kid, I'm a medic. American!

Marwan calms down... a little. Jason strokes his hair, applies gel to the boy's wound.

MISSILES IMPACT somewhere nearby. Jason shudders.

JASON

Though sometimes... that's bad, too.

SUPER: LATER

Jason and Marwan huddle, hidden from the world. Marwan drifts in and out of sleep. Time passes - shadows drift.

It's getting dark. Marwan stirs.

MARWAN
I'm hungry.

JASON
Me too.

Marwan's stomach grumbles.

JASON
Try not to think about it. That just
makes it worse.

MARWAN
We should leave.

JASON
Easier said than done.

MARWAN
We MUST leave. Before soldiers come!

Explosions in the distance. Both wince. Jason waves a weak
hand towards the door.

JASON
Better to wait 'til that stops. They
could be outside right now.

Marwan grows quiet, doodles in the ground with a shard.
Jason shivers at the mud - a mix of dirt and blood.

JASON
(whispers to himself)
Don't think about it, Jason. That
just makes it way... WAY worse.

He watches Marwan draw.

JASON
Kid - where'd you learn English?

MARWAN
My uncle. He's very smart.

JASON
Your uncle? Wait - where's he from?

MARWAN
Gaza City. Why?

JASON

Next of kin... Never mind. When we find a phone, we'll call your uncle.

Marwan shrugs, keeps drawing.

MARWAN

That won't help.

JASON

Your family needs to know where you are!

Marwan sighs at Jason's cluelessness.

MARWAN

My uncle is a martyr. IDF soldiers shot him in the market last year.

JASON

Oh. How about... your mom?

MARWAN

She's dead, too. Not from the occupation. She died when I was born.

Marwan sculpts cartoonish figures from dirt. The blood acts as accidental glue. Jason notices. Doesn't say a word.

JASON

Hey, that's pretty good. Do you want to be an artist when you grow up?

MARWAN

I do art things now. My father says -

His voice falters, remembering...

JASON

When we get to a hospital, you're gonna need to heal awhile. I'll make SURE they give you art supplies. You know, to kill...uh, PASS the time.

(beat)

That looks fun. Lemme try!

He sculpts a mud FIGURE.

JASON

See? I'm an artist, too!

Marwan shrugs, unimpressed. Jason returns to his sculpture, packs on more to beef its "muscles" up.

JASON

Gimme a break. Looks like Gumby.

(beat)

You don't know who that is, huh?

Silence as the two distract themselves. Occasional BLASTS cause them to look up. Hold their breath. Until...

MARWAN

You are Jewish?

JASON

The necklace clued you in? My mom gave it to me as a good luck charm.

MARWAN

Why aren't you with the soldiers?

JASON

I came to Gaza to HELP.

Marwan doesn't respond. Jason's explanation stumbles along:

JASON

Those soldiers out there; don't think or speak for me.

(whispers to himself)

If being Jewish has meaning, those guys out there are... anything BUT. Jewish values PROTECT people. They don't hurt them. Especially not kids.

Instinctively, Jason touches his Star of David. Forcing a smile, he repositions his figurine to wave at the boy.

JASON

This looks like a Golem.

MARWAN

A "Golem"? What is such a thing?

Jason uses his necklace, stamps a mark on the figure's torso.

JASON

It's an old story about a creature made from mud. They made an extra famous one way back when, in Prague.

MARWAN

Prague?

JASON

A city in Czechoslovakia. All you gotta know is far from here. Golems are dumb but better than HUMAN soldiers. Kinda like the Hulk, they crutch enemies to bits!

Jason fishes a NOTEPAD and PEN from his pocket. Scribbles on the paper:

JASON

This word means "Truth" in Hebrew. Rabbis write special words, put it in the Golem's mouth. That brings it to life, like Frankenstein. Grrrrr!

Marwan flinches.

JASON

Chill. Golems are MADE to PROTECT folks like you and me.

Picking up the figure, Jason eyes it critically.

JASON

And this little guy's too tiny. At most, he could bite off a bad guy's toe. If he's not wearing boots.

The joke's lame, but brings a smile to Marwan's face. The boy laughs. Jason does, too - temporarily. Then cringes.

JASON

Ow.

Peeking under his shirt, Jason reexamines his wound. PUS oozes. Bright red, it looks inflamed.

JASON

Forget protectors. I need a hospital.

Thinking quick, he flips the paper over. Pulls out his cell, searches a name. Writes it down, with a number.

JASON

Marwan - listen to me. If for some reason I'm... not able to talk to you and you're near a *working* phone, I need you to call this number. It's my older brother, David. Tell him where I am, and say you're now MY little bro. Karma gets passed along. He'll have to help both me AND you.

Marwan looks confused, but takes the paper.

MARWAN
I don't understand.

JASON
Do you have siblings?

MARWAN
What is *that* word?

JASON
Do you have brothers or sisters?

Marwan shakes his head "no".

JASON
It's an inside joke. Brothers do that to each other. Promise you'll call?

MARWAN
I do.

Jason smiles. Eyes drifting to his cell, he growls.

JASON
If this wasn't a doorstep -

A bar on the cell FLICKERS. Jason's face lights up. Hope!

JASON
Speaking of. Karma comes through!

The bars drop. Jason eases to his left. Nothing. Then to his right. That causes pain, but... the signal improves!

Reception seems strong near the door. Jason belly crawls towards it - favors his uninjured side.

Reaching the opening, he sloooooowwly raises the cell.
THREE BARS!

Grinning, he dials EMERGENCY. A DISPATCHER'S VOICE crackles.

DISPATCHER
Hello?

JASON
Hey - this is Jason Goodman. I'm in Paramedic Team 586, Khan Younis. My ambulance was... destroyed. My partner Bulos is -
(MORE)

JASON (cont'd)
(chokes)
Gone. But I'm alive and injured.
There's a child patient here, too.

He glances at Marwan, now playing with the Golem figurine.

JASON
His name is Marwan.

Marwan starts to come over. Jason waves him off.

JASON
Not now. Stay clear!

The dispatcher's voice distorts more:

DISPATCHER
Please repeat. If you need to call
back with a better connection -

JASON
No! I don't know how long this cell
will last. Send help! I'm at -

He raises his head, lowers the cell towards his mouth.

CRACK! A bullet shoots out - a direct hit to the chest!

Marwan screams. Jason drops the phone, doubles over. Looks towards Marwan, whispers...

JASON
Don't run. Hide!

CRACK! A second bullet finds its mark. A headshot.

Lifeless, Jason's body tumbles halfway out the broken door - the silver Star of David necklace dangles in the dirt.

Marwan scrambles back. Curls into a ball and screams.

Faint explosions echo nearby.

Marwan grabs the mud figurine. Remembering the paper with the Hebrew word, he shoves the scrap in the figure's mouth.

Then "plants" the figurine in front of him as "protection." Marwan begins to rock. Shivers. Waits.

LATER

Shadows lengthen. Eventually, fatigue and shock win. Marwan can't escape sleep, either.

He nods off. The RUMBLE of tanks, his lullaby.

A SHADOW falls across his face. Growing from the ground; a shapeless, vaguely human form.

EXT. OUTCROP OF ROCKS - NIGHT

Past Bulos' cold corpse. And the burned out ambulance...

An IDF SNIPER nestles behind two LARGE ROCKS - the barrel of his rifle wedged between cracks.

Bored, he smokes - plays games on his cell.

A TEXT flashes onscreen (Hebrew, English subtitles):

"Sending second strike in one hour. Make sure no-one escapes."

The sniper chuckles, scrolls through Girly pictures. Pulls a PROTEIN BAR from his pack. Stops when he sees -

A HUGE SHADOW looming in the doorway of the bombed building.

It steps over Jason. The sniper puts the bar down, sneers.

SNIPER

(Hebrew, subtitled)

Stupid animal. If you want to make this easy, good.

POP POP! Two shots at the silhouette. One to the head. The other the chest.

But the silhouette keeps walking. Bigger and blacker with each step.

Stubbing out his cigarette, the sniper re-aims. POP POP POP!

SNIPER

Body armor? Try this!

BITS fly off the Silhouette's head. But it KEEPS WALKING.

It reaches the rock. The sniper blasts through its chest.

SNIPER

Is this what you want?

The figure grabs the barrel of the rifle, PULLS.

Crashing the sniper face-first into the rocks. The rifle ripped from his hands so quickly, skin scrapes off.

Face pressed against the silhouette, the sniper gawks THROUGH the hole he's blasted in its torso. Jason's body and the bombed building visible in the dark.

Terrified, the sniper looks up at the creature's faceless head. His jaw drops.

The creature turns the rifle around, smashes DOWN. Blood SPATTERS rocks.

Soon the sniper's screaming... stops.

INT. COLLAPSED ROOM - MORNING

Daylight flits past Marwan's face. Waking, he blinks. Strangely, the shadow returns.

Looking up, the boy sees -

The mud figure - now seven feet tall. It stands like a statue. Marwan gapes.

MARWAN

Hello?

Glancing down, Marwan finds a gift. The sniper's protein bar. Marwan grabs it - starts to eat, then thinks...

MARWAN

Are you MY Golem?

The mud sculpture stands eerily still.

Marwan spots the hole in the creature's torso. He pokes a finger through it. Grows braver, waves his hand around.

When he accidentally touches an edge, blood rubs off. Marwan blinks at fresh stains on his skin.

MARWAN

Did you get hurt?

No response.

MARWAN

Can you carry me out of here?

The figure doesn't move.

Marwan glances AROUND the figure towards the door. Jason's body still hangs there. Tears shine in Marwan's eyes.

MARWAN

Why didn't you protect him? Isn't
that what you're made to do?

Marwan glances up, defiant. The paper's still in the Golem's mouth.

On the other side: the address and number Jason wrote.

Balancing on his good leg, Marwan removes the paper.

The figure VAPORIZES; turns to a heap of dust on the floor!

Marwan glances from the dirt to Jason's body. Then back to the dirt once more.

LATER

There's only so much one injured child can do. Marwan works carefully, pulls Jason away from the door.

Shovels dirt over Jason's body. Pats down the mound 'til it's smooth.

Fishing Jason's Star of David necklace from a pocket, Marwan reverently lays it on the grave.

He copies the Hebrew word "Truth" from the paper. Draws it on the graves' surface with his finger in a childish scrawl.

Then looks to the door. No explosions now. Then back to Jason's resting place.

MARWAN

I'll call your brother and show him
where to find you. No-one should be
left alone.

Clutching Jason's cell, Marwan inches to the door. Peeks-

EXT. BOMBED OUT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Finds silence. Desolation. No sign of soldiers. Yet.

Marwan slips out, uses a BROKEN BEAM as a makeshift crutch.

Wincing, he closes his eyes. Waits for a bullet to seal his fate. It doesn't. Marwan sags, relieved. Looks around.

Then starts hobbling towards a distant road.

Past the burned out ambulance.

Past the rock outcrop spattered with blood. Spotting the sniper's limp hand - and IDF uniform - Marwan TENSES...

Realizing the soldier's dead, he relaxes. Passes him, too.

Marwan glances at the cell screen. His face lights up in discovery: THREE BARS.

Typing the phone number into the cell, Marwan dials.

A man (DAVID) picks up.

DAVID (O.S.)

Hello?

MARWAN

My name is Marwan.

DAVID (O.S.)

Who are you? Why do you have Jason's number?

MARWAN

We're... brothers, too?

DAVID (O.S.)

Excuse me?

MARWAN

Someone please come pick me up?

Marwan listens to David's response. Keeps walking.

An injured child can't do so much. But Marwan's determined to get as far away from this Hell on Earth as he can.

FINAL FADEOUT: