

BENEATH THE HOLY CITY

by
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*Excerpt from the last will & testament of Rabbi Chaim Eliyahu
Jerusalem, Palestine, 1946*

I cannot in good conscience depart this life without recording what I know about the Jerusalem Murders of 1912. For anyone reading this too young to remember, they began without warning in the summer and ended just as abruptly in the autumn, leaving dozens dead. To this day, the murderer has never been caught, and no one knows who did it or why.

No one, that is, except me.

Yet I have kept silent all these decades, and for good reasons. Who would believe that my amateur research solved a mystery that stumped the Ottoman police? For I am not a detective, nor a policeman, nor even fully a man; I am merely a stunted dwarf, a failed rabbi, and a dreary librarian.

More importantly, though, is what my investigation uncovered about who the murderer was—or rather, *what* it was. Had I told anyone that, at best I'd have been laughed off as a fool, and at worst locked up as a madman. Indeed, I wouldn't believe such a wild tale myself, had I not lived it.

But now I grow old, my own death is near, and I feel I must leave *some* record of what happened back in 1912. That way, even if the Jews are once again driven from Jerusalem, at least the gentiles can still learn how to destroy the thing crawling under the Holy City, should it ever return... for I am not certain I destroyed it, all those years ago.

Unfortunately, the only one who can answer that question, who knows the whole truth, is the Mad Rabbi himself... but he is long dead, taking his secrets to the grave. In fact, it was

only a few weeks after he died that the murders started. At the time, I thought nothing of it, nor did anyone. But now, looking back, I realize his death might have set everything in motion.

I confess I paid little attention to the first few murders beyond noticing the articles in the newspapers—but to be fair, no one did, at least not right away. Not even the Ottoman police had realized they were connected yet. Besides, the Old City of Jerusalem is small—only a few square miles—but densely populated. With tens of thousands of people, especially of such different races and religions, packed into so small a place, homicides are sadly not uncommon. The Four Quarters of Jerusalem usually manage to coexist in relative peace... but there's always tensions right below the surface, ready to flare up.

What finally caught my attention—indeed, the attention of the whole city, and caused the Ottoman detectives to investigate more aggressively—was when those three boys were killed. It was a shock to me, for I knew them... although not in a good way. They were typical street kids, young teenagers with nothing better to do than wander around Jerusalem looking for something to relieve their boredom. Unfortunately, sometimes that distraction was me.

A dwarf always sticks out from a crowd as different and strange; add to that the kids being bigger than a grown man, and the rare opportunity to physically intimidate an adult, and I was an irresistible target. When other adults were around, the boys were content to taunt and insult me, not only for my height and disproportioned limbs, but for my yarmulke, earlocks, and Hebrew accent. On the rare occasions I encountered them alone, they were more physical—shoving me, tripping me, knocking things from my arms, and once even hurling rocks.

Still, it was shocking to read they'd been murdered, and rather brutally so. Despite their petty crimes, no one deserves to be butchered like that, least of all children. Which raised the question in everyone's mind: who could do such a thing?

From then on, I followed the story much more closely in the newspapers. Shortly after that, the Ottoman detectives finally realized the triple murder was part of a larger pattern. When this was announced in the newspapers, fear struck the city. Many worried Jerusalem had its own repeat murderer, like the infamous Ripper of London a few decades earlier.

Thankfully, at least *I* could do more than merely hope and pray the murderer was caught soon. You see, after being ordained as a rabbi but failing to find a congregation, I instead applied for and secured a job in the library of my *alma mater*, Yeshiva Beit Hashamayim. I'd like to think it was due to my excellent academic record... but I suspect pity may have played a role. Whatever the reason, I devoted myself to my job, and within a few years rose to Assistant Librarian. Now I had a vast network of information for the city of Jerusalem at my disposal, the perfect position from which to launch my own amateur investigation of the recent murders.

Combing through newspaper articles and taking detailed notes, I determined the related homicides had many, admittedly puzzling, similarities. Although they occurred at different times and places, they always happened at night and outdoors. The attacks were incredibly fast and brutal; no witnesses saw anything. Occasionally bystanders heard screams and came running, but when they arrived the violence was over and the killer gone. Some did, however, report seeing a dark shape fleeing through the shadows, but not a person—some guessed a large dog or sheep, others a goat, or perhaps a small donkey or mule. No one was quite sure what to make of that detail.

There was, however, one puzzling difference between the homicides. The causes of death varied; some victims were bludgeoned, while others slashed, stabbed, even hacked to death (but not, curiously, shot). Based on this, the Ottoman detectives announced in a press

release that they suspected multiple attackers armed with different weapons, including clubs, axes, and long knives—machetes, perhaps. This only frightened the people of Jerusalem more; one murderer was bad enough; a gang of murderers was a nightmare.

Scrutinizing the few other press releases from the Jerusalem Police Department, I surmised that they'd found little evidence to work with. The killer never left a murder weapon behind, nor were there footprints; even the new study of fingerprints yielded nothing. Despite evidence some victims fought back, the murderer's blood was never found. Furthermore, there was no obvious motive; the detectives could only guess.

Unfortunately, the attacks had two other similarities, something that bode ill for the Jews: Christians and Muslims were quick to notice that none of the victims were Jewish, and no murders had taken place within the Jewish Quarter. For some, that was all the proof they needed that the Jews were behind the slaughter. Already I was hearing worried reports from my family, friends, and colleagues that the goyim were muttering that the Jews had done this, and if the people of Jerusalem wanted the murders to stop, they'd have to take action into their own hands. I've studied enough Jewish history to know where such rumors invariably end: in a pogrom.

I next decided to research the victims, hoping to find some common link or motive. I searched newspapers, public records, legal documents, even followed up on local rumors and gossip. Unfortunately, what I found further incriminated, rather than exonerated, the Jews—all the victims had a history of harassing Jewish people. Some were petty bullies like the children who mocked me. Others were businessmen Jews suspected of cheating them. Still others were rumored to have vandalized a synagogue. The list went on and on, a litany of the typical petty insults and aggressions Jews have long learned to live with. Sadly, in most cases there

wasn't enough evidence to prove any of the more serious crimes (and perhaps not enough political will to investigate them seriously), so they went unpunished. That said, while such behavior by gentiles is certainly condemnable, it hardly warranted a death penalty.

Worse, I noticed another coincidence, one that gentiles and detectives alike seemed to have overlooked so far, but that lent further credibility to the idea that the killer was Jewish. The murders never occurred from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Whoever the murderer or murderers were, they observed Shabbat.

As time passed, I grew more frustrated. My independent research had yielded little more than I imagined the Ottoman detectives already knew—and what I *had* discovered was very disheartening. With my investigation stalled and tensions in Jerusalem continuing to build, I decided to personally investigate the scene of the next attack.

I didn't have to wait long. A pair of Turkish soldiers (whom my subsequent research later revealed were accused of violating a young Jewish woman) were killed one night just outside the Jewish Quarter. It fit the same *modus operandi* as the other repeat murders—bystanders heard gunfire and screaming, but no one saw anything, nor was any evidence left behind. Rumor held that although the soldiers fired their rifles, if they hit their attacker, no blood was found.

By the time I visited the scene of the crime, precious little was left to see. The constables had removed the bodies and what little evidence they could find, and two Turkish government types were busy washing the blood off the cobblestones. Absently, I noticed the bloodstained water running off the side of the road and down the escarpment of the Western Hill. For a moment I worried it might pour into the Lower Aqueduct, briefly appearing above ground, and contaminate the city's water supply—but thankfully the waste water flowed well

clear of it, and the aqueduct's stream continued to flow lazily from Solomon's Pool to the Temple Mount undisturbed.

As I wandered around staring at the ground in the vain hope of finding something the Ottomans missed, something glinting in the dust of the cobbles caught my eye. I picked it up to examine, thinking it was a shell casing from the soldier's rifles, but I was mistaken. Instead, it was a small, thick piece of metal, jagged and twisted like a scrap of shrapnel. Furthermore, it wasn't the shiny gold of brass, but rather a tarnished yellow-brown... bronze, perhaps.

That was when I first thought of the Mad Rabbi.

I confess I barely knew the Mad Rabbi, and paid little attention to him while he lived. Most of what I've learned about him I gathered in the years since his death. His full name was Rabbi Meir Itskowitz, but we called him "the Mad Rabbi," a humorous nickname for an eccentric but harmless old man of questionable rabbinical credentials. Knowing what I know now, though, that moniker takes on more sinister connotations.

He was one of the many Ashkenazi Zionists immigrating to Palestine during the 1880s when waves of antisemitic riots swept the Russian Empire. True, he arrived suspicious and distrustful to the point of paranoia, seeing oppression everywhere, but may have had good reason. He claimed his family was systematically persecuted for years in Poland—part of the Russian Empire at the time—before the Warsaw Pogrom finally burned his shop and drove him from his home, barely escaping with his life... and that may be true.

Shortly after arriving, he petitioned several Palestinian synagogues to hire him as their Rabbi, with no success. It wasn't surprising—he was evasive about which yeshiva he'd attended or which rabbinate granted him a smicha, and his knowledge of Talmud and Mishnah was highly selective at best, leaning far more toward the mystical than the scholarly. Many

concluded he'd simply ordained himself, a phenomenon not unheard of in Judaism. But there was another problem: he was a militant Zionist, impatient for the reestablishment of Israel to the point of spreading sedition against the Ottoman Empire. Understandably, no synagogue wanted a rabbi who might draw attention and hostility from the Turkish government.

In this respect, I felt some kinship with the Mad Rabbi; we were both rabbis without a pulpit. I realized early on that my short stature and disproportioned limbs meant I'd never be competent at physical labor—but in scholarship, I could compete as an equal. At yeshiva, I devoted myself to my studies and became a top student, devouring Torah, Talmud, and Mishnah, even Theological Kabbalah. I was awarded a smicha, became a rabbi, and applied to synagogues across Palestine for a position... but, as I'd suspected, I was unable to find a congregation willing to accept a dwarf as their rabbi. Sadly, I was also unmarried and childless for the same reason.

Eventually the Mad Rabbi gave up and opened a tiny repair shop in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem. He came from a family of clockmakers, and knew the trade well. By all accounts, he was a mechanical savant, never given a broken device he couldn't fix, and soon earned a living repairing everything from watches to typewriters to steam engines. Over the years he became part of our community, his eccentricities tolerated for the valuable service he provided as Meir Itskowitz the Mad Rabbi, Handyman of the Jewish Quarter.

But what everyone remembered him for, of course, was his golem.

For years, he claimed to be building a golem, "to protect G-d's Chosen in Jerusalem from the goyim and Ottomans," or so he claimed—not that anyone believed him, of course. I certainly didn't... not at the time, at least. Golems, crude men of clay built by a rabbi and brought to life by the name of G-d to serve and protect, were merely Jewish legend and

folklore, nothing more. Although a few of the more Orthodox in our community grumbled that the Mad Rabbi's efforts were sacrilegious, most of us were content to let the eccentric old man indulge his fantasies. If he wanted to waste his time building a golem in his workshop, let him try.

This is not to say, however, that there wasn't considerable curiosity about his project, an interest heightened by the Mad Rabbi's refusal to let anyone see what he was working on. He claimed he didn't want to unveil his masterpiece until it was finished, a date we all assumed to be the day after never. Others thought his secretiveness was another manifestation of his paranoia, an irrational fear of others stealing his ideas and designs. Whatever the reason, he was clearly working on *something* in there, and it wasn't mud or clay, but metal and plate. The grinding and drilling of his various machine tools could often be heard late into the night (to the irritation of his neighbors). Only during Shabbat did his workshop fall silent.

So it was no surprise that when the Mad Rabbi finally passed away a few months earlier, a veritable mob of nosy yentes searched his tiny shop, hoping to finally see what he'd been working on all his life... but they found nothing. Nothing complete, at least—only unidentifiable bits and pieces of baffling machinery strewn across the workshop. They were impressive specimens, certainly, sophisticated contraptions of unimaginable complexity, densely packed with springs and tension bars and cogwheels of every shape and size... and totally incomprehensible purpose. No one had the slightest idea what the devices were supposed to *do*, and speculated they were smaller pieces of an incomplete whole. Furthermore, they were all made of bronze, a curious and puzzling choice of material in an age where steel was readily available. By now, his neighbors were more convinced than ever that the poor old fellow had been mad as a hatter for thinking he could build a golem.

Out of bronze. Like the shard I held in my hand.

My mind instantly rebelled; it was too ridiculous to consider.

I discounted the thought as unworthy and returned to my examination of the crime scene. Yet as I walked home through the Jewish Quarter, empty-handed and discouraged, I couldn't get the Mad Rabbi's golem out of my mind. The more I thought about it, the more the pieces seemed to fit. It would certainly explain why no victims were Jews, why no murders happened in the Jewish Quarter, even the killer observing Shabbat. According to legend, golems were more than strong enough to kill a person—or several—quickly, and didn't feel pain or bleed when stabbed or shot... that would explain the lack of blood evidence. And the choice of victims—gentiles who mistreated Jews—was exactly who the paranoid Mad Rabbi would have instructed his golem to protect the Jewish Quarter from. The timing worked out, too—the murders began only a few weeks after the Mad Rabbi's death. As preposterous as it was, it all made a bizarre kind of sense.

I shook my head and laughed at myself for even entertaining this train of thought. And just how, pray tell, could a big bronze golem move about the city, even at night, without even one person seeing it?

And then I remembered the aqueduct.

I came to a halt as a chill swept my body, despite the dry Palestinian heat. The aqueducts under the Holy City are vast and ancient. For over five thousand years, Jerusalem's various conquerors have rebuilt and expanded the waterworks as the city grew, creating a jumbled patchwork of Judean and Roman and Arab construction, some extending deep into the earth. True, the Holy City has been razed to the ground twice during its long history—but what was *under* the ground has always remained. Today the water tunnels are an

insanely complex maze of aqueducts and channels, pools and reservoirs, tanks and cisterns, all of which have never been fully explored or mapped. I could think of no better way to move around the city at night without being seen, or a safer place to hide during the day, than deep within the aqueducts.

Technically, it was reasonable, but... no, it was irrational, it was insane! I tried to ignore the idea, told myself I was being foolish... but it was too late. The germ of curiosity had infected my brain, and wouldn't be cured until I'd either confirmed or disproved my theory.

I walked straight to my yeshiva's library, pulled out a map of Jerusalem, dug up whatever maps I could find of the subterranean waterways, and began to cross-reference them against my meticulous research notes on every single murder. One by one, I checked each location off my list. Each and every attack was within one city block of an entrance to the aqueducts.

I sat back in my chair, my mind reeling, face to face with the impossible and not sure what to think. Clearly I'd stumbled across something important here—possibly the clue that would catch the killer—and I couldn't ignore it.

But... *golems*?

I'd always considered myself a modern Jew, an academic and a scholar, and—now that I was confronted with the mystical—a *secular* Jew. Yes, I believed in G-d and the angels, even the Adversary... but not in golems and dybbuks and Kabbalistic magic.

Then again, the Mad Rabbi's golem *wasn't* made of clay and brought to life by magic. It was gears and springs and metal. Could it be? Was the murderer a clockwork automaton? It was highly unlikely... but it was, just barely, possible.

That was when I realized that I wouldn't rest—*couldn't* rest—until I'd delved into the aqueducts under the Holy City myself, to determine for sure, one way or another, the truth.

But first, I needed to do more research about golems. Unfortunately, although I could recite all the mitzvot by heart, I'd never bothered to learn much about golems. For the first time in my life, I dug deep into tomes of Practical Kabbalah—for lack of a better term, Jewish magic. It was a practice that, while not strictly forbidden, was certainly discouraged and frowned upon. As I researched the fables and folklore, I theorized that even if the Mad Rabbi's creation wasn't a true golem, merely an automaton, presumably he modeled it after the golems of legend—hopefully including ways to control or destroy it. It was in the *Sefer Raziel Ha-Malakh* that I found what I needed: Supposedly, the way to bring a golem to life was to insert a *shem*—a tiny scroll with one of the Names of G-d written on it—into the golem's mouth. To disenchant the golem, one needed only to remove the shem.

If the golem was an automaton, though, it would take much more than pulling out a scroll to kill it. I decided against a pistol—after all, two Turkish soldiers had shot the golem, and it didn't have much effect. The only thing I could think of that could harm a machine was explosives. It was difficult and expensive, but I managed to obtain a half-stick of dynamite—as I said, there were a few radical Zionists considering more direct means of liberating Israel from the Ottoman Empire. I dared not use more than half a stick—if I used too much explosive in the tight confines of channels cut from solid rock, I was as likely to harm myself as the golem, not to mention risking a cave-in.

It seemed prudent to invest in climbing equipment—hammer, pitons, and rope—as the aqueducts were designed for water, not people, and certainly not for a dwarf to navigate. I also acquired a miner's helmet with a carbide lamp, an electric torch, and carried spare fuel

and batteries for both. Running out of light in that pitch-black maze was my greatest fear—were that to happen, I was as good as dead. My next greatest fear was becoming lost in the aqueducts. To avoid that fate, I gathered every partial and incomplete map of the aqueducts I could find and compiled them together into one. There were many gaps, indicating unexplored and unknown areas, but it was better than nothing.

Thankfully, it was August by then, and the water level in the aqueducts was at its lowest. For a normal man, the water would rise only to their shins; for me, it varied between my knees and my waist. I confess I progressed painfully slowly, making several expeditions over several days, frequently stopping to measure and map the uncharted tunnels. Even if I explored the entire waterworks and found nothing, I told myself, at least I'd have a complete map of the aqueducts, which was no small work of scholarship. The Ottomans might even wish to purchase it from me—that, at least, would help me recover the costs of these lunatic expeditions.

Occasionally I heard strange, regular clicking sounds echoing through the tunnels that I couldn't quite identify, but decided must only be water dripping somewhere. So far I'd found nothing but rock, water, and rats, and with each passing day became more convinced I was wasting my time, berating myself for a superstitious fool. Perhaps that's why I was so unprepared when it happened.

I was deep in the aqueducts, exploring uncharted territory where, according to my maps, several partially-explored tunnels *might* converge. I guessed there was a reservoir at their nexus, so when I climbed out of an aqueduct and splashed into waist-high water collected in a wide basin, I was rather pleased with my intuition. As I splashed around, shining my electric torch at the rough-hewn walls looking for other tunnels I suspected fed into this

reservoir, the torch light reflected off something. I turned my head to shine my helmet's lamp in that direction... and froze in shock.

In the silence of that sunken chamber, I could hear soft ticking—not like a watch, but several, overlapping, and ticking away at different speeds. The tarnished bronze figure before me glowed dully in the dim light, except where streaks of greenish discoloration ran down the sides. At first, I couldn't comprehend what I was seeing, it was so alien. I had, perhaps foolishly, assumed the Mad Rabbi had built his golem in the shape of a man. I was wrong. He felt confined by no such limitations. What hid in the darkness I can only describe as the bastard offspring of a spider, a crab, and a scorpion.

Even now, decades later, I still shiver at the memory of what I saw. It was indeed the size of a large dog or small donkey, just like the shadow some witnesses saw fleeing the murder scenes. At its center was a spherical body bristling with spikes, the bronze surface between them covered with engravings of Hebrew letters, Kabbalistic symbols, and other occult glyphs I dimly recognized from grimoires I'd read. Protruding from the center, six long, spindly, multi-jointed legs ending in wicked blades held the body up out of the water. Four segmented tentacle-like "arms" sprouted from the sphere, two ending in "hands" of three opposing inward-curving blades. A third tentacle held a huge pair of pincer-like shears, and the fourth a chain-driven circular saw. Unlike the bladed legs, washed clean by the water, the diabolical instruments sprouting from the tentacles were encrusted with dried blood.

I stood there staring at it, frozen in horror. I suddenly understood why the Mad Rabbi never let anyone see his vile creation—it was terrifying, hideous and repulsive. Only a disturbed and twisted mind could have created this mechanical monstrosity to butcher people.

It was then that I realized it had no head. How was I supposed to disable this golem when it had no mouth to pull a shem from?

And then it moved.

The golem turned, its legs splashing through the water as it rotated toward me.

I took an involuntary step backwards. For a moment everything was calm as we stared at each other in silence.

Did it know I was Jewish? Could it tell I was a rabbi?

Did it care?

Or did it have orders to kill *anyone* who found its hiding place?

Suddenly it burst into motion. The claws grasped, the shears snapped, the saw blade spun, and it started skittering toward me.

I ran. I'm not proud of my cowardice, but alone in the dark with a horrific killing machine, I was overcome by terror.

But running through waist-deep water is slow at best. I tossed a frightened glance over my shoulder, and caught a glimpse of the golem gaining on me, moving faster than I would have believed such a heavy object could. I'd never reach the inflow channel where I entered before it overtook me. I looked around in panic for a weapon, an escape route, a place to hide, *anything*.

Then I saw it—an overflow chute, just above the water line, much closer to me than the inflow channel. It was a small tunnel, too narrow for the golem, too narrow for a man—but perhaps not for a dwarf.

I surged toward it through the water, hearing the golem's infernal ticking echoing closer and closer behind me. I grabbed the lip of the pipe, jumped, shoved my feet inside, and

pushed off. For a moment I slid down the incline—then three claws clamped down around my head. Only my miner's helmet saved me; even then, the bladed claws cut deep into the metal brim. I screamed in terror as I felt myself being pulled back up the chute. For a horrifying moment I struggled with my helmet's leather strap under my chin, trying to loosen it, not sure if I could—then my head slipped free and I was sliding down into the darkness.

I slid down the shaft for a long way before finally splashing down feet-first into a small catch pool. I staggered and stumbled, but managed to remain standing, keeping my dynamite and electric torch from being soaked and ruined. A second later, my mangled helmet tumbled out of the chute with a splash, the carbide lamp extinguishing with a hiss as it sank. I paused for a moment to gather my breath and wits. For now, I was far away from the golem, thank G-d, but I wasn't exactly sure where I was—I'd been exploring an unmapped portion of the aqueducts when I stumbled across it. If I kept running blindly, I'd become hopelessly lost and die down here, even if the golem *didn't* catch me. I pulled out my map and compass and tried to orient myself.

I'd been studying the chart for several minutes when I heard the sound that froze my blood: a faint ticking echoing down the aqueducts. I stood still, ears straining. The sound was coming from the outflow channel... and sure enough, the ticking was getting louder, closer, and now I could hear splashing too. That blasphemous machine was *chasing* me!

I struggled not to panic and I shone my torch around, looking for other exits. There should be multiple overflow chutes emptying into a catch pool like this... but when I found them, my heart nearly stopped. They were high up on the walls, difficult even for a full-sized man to grasp, and far beyond my reach. I could certainly use rope, piton, and hammer to reach them if I had enough time—but I didn't. The only exit available was the outflow

channel—but that's exactly where the ticking and splashing was coming from, getting louder every second.

If I couldn't run, then I had to fight.

My heart pounding, I reached for the half-stick of dynamite and matchbox. If I set it off in this enclosed space, I might well kill myself—but at least I'd take that unholy contraption with me. I shone my torch down the outflow channel, and in the distance could see light glistening faintly off the dull bronze of the golem's crawling limbs, closing fast—not much time left. I waited until it was only a few meters away, then with trembling hands struck a match off the stone and lit the fuse low, near the base. I held it as long as I dared, then hurled it down the channel, praying it didn't fall in the water. I dashed away as I heard the stick bounce once. An instant after I pressed my body against the rock wall, it detonated.

There was a blinding flash of light, a deafening crack, and a shockwave that knocked me off my feet. The air filled with smoke and shrapnel. A moment later, a rumbling crash echoed through the chamber as dust and rubble poured out of the tunnel. I huddled in the water, hands over my head, face against the wall as debris rained down on me. A few seconds later, the chaos slowed and stopped, leaving the chamber still and silent.

Slowly I lifted my head and looked around. Coughing in the smoke-filled air, my ears ringing, I rose and shone my torch into the outflow channel. A few yards down, the tunnel had caved in, crushing the golem under earth and stone. I felt a moment of grim satisfaction.

Then, through the dust and smoke, something glinted in my torch light.

As the air cleared, I realized that the golem wasn't completely buried by the rubble. Part of its spherical body, though scratched and dented, was still exposed. I could see parts of its spindly legs poking through the debris—although twisted and bent, they still jerked and

twitched. Its tentacle-arms were pinned under the rocks, but I could see parts of them squirming and writhing, struggling to pull themselves loose. One tentacle slithered and weaved as its claws clenched around a rock and dragged it off the pile.

Dear G-d... the monstrous thing was still alive, trying to dig its way out! It was pinned down for now—but for how long?

I stepped into the tunnel and approached it slowly, cautiously, ready to run in an instant... but, strangely, the golem didn't react as I drew closer. Damaged and partly buried under rubble, perhaps it was deaf or blind or both; either way, it seemed unaware of my presence. I stared down at the remains of the golem quietly ticking away, not quite sure what to do next. Bash it with a rock?

Suddenly I noticed something on its round body, something I'd missed before amid the spikes and engravings: a wide, deep socket of some sort. Below that was the outline of a rectangle, with a hinge on one end and screws at the other—a hatch of some kind. It occurred to me that, although this golem had no mouth, this was the closest parallel.

I don't know where I found the courage but, always keeping one eye on the wriggling tentacles, I improvised a screwdriver from the flat end of a climbing piton and managed to remove the screws with trembling fingers, then opened the panel.

Inside, a set of gears spun a double scroll, like a miniature Torah, back and forth. This scroll, however, was made not of parchment, but of a thin sheet of bronze with holes randomly punched through it.

Was this the shem? Were the holes some code for one of the Names of G-d?

Would removing it disenchant the golem?

There was only one way to know for sure. I reached in, seized the scrolls, and ripped them out.

The moment I did, the golem's limbs stopped twitching and writhing. One by one, the machine's various, constant tickings slowed, then stopped. After a few minutes, it was silent and still.

"Baruch HaShem," I whispered in relief, then sent up a silent prayer of thanks to G-d.

There is not much to tell after that. I climbed up to one of the other overflow chutes that emptied into that catch pool, got my bearings, and returned to the surface. The Jerusalem Murders stopped after that, and tensions in the city gradually eased. My story should have ended there, and I desperately wish it did.

A few days later, after recovering from the ordeal, I headed back down into the aqueducts armed with a hatchet and kerosene blowlamp, determined to reduce the golem to a pile of scrap to scatter throughout the tunnels.

But when I returned to the site of our battle, the golem was gone. The rubble had been cleared, and the tunnel repaired. Since that day, I've never seen or heard anything about the Golem of Jerusalem.

Perhaps some Ottoman maintenance men, drawn by a blockage in the water system, found and removed that maniacal machine. Perhaps the Turks are studying it right now, trying to unravel the Mad Rabbi's engineering secrets. I hope that's what happened, because the alternative is worse.

The golem was clockwork—of this I'm certain. Bronze, my later research found, is highly resistant to rust and corrosion; apparently the Mad Rabbi specifically designed his

golem to operate in the aqueducts, starting with his choice of materials. Clearly the golem wasn't steam-powered, for it couldn't have kept its boiler fires alight while wading through the water tunnels, not to mention finding a fresh supply of coal. Nor was the golem electric, or it would have shorted out the first time it got wet. No, clockwork is the only thing that could have operated in the water.

But anyone who owns a clock knows its mainspring must be wound daily to keep it working. If the golem was clockwork, then how did it wind its mainspring? Surely it couldn't have done it itself. Looking back, I don't remember seeing a windup key, but I do dimly remember what might have been a socket for the key, right above the hatch I opened.

Where is the key? Who has it? Does anyone? If not, then who wound the golem? Who chose its victims, gave it instructions, oiled and maintained its machinery?

Did the Mad Rabbi have a disciple? Or several? Do they have the golem now, repaired and restored, waiting only for the shem to revive it?

If so, they won't get it from me. I destroyed the shem decades ago, but not before showing it to an engineer. He told me it was actually something called a "punch-tape," a device for giving instructions to advanced machines like power looms and tabulators. When I asked him if it was possible for someone to recreate this particular tape, he told me it was—provided they knew how that specific machine worked.

I desperately hope and pray that only the Mad Rabbi understood how his golem worked, and only he could build another shem. But if not... then the possibility exists that someday, someone could create another shem to revive that murderous machine—and then the Golem of Jerusalem will rise again from beneath the Holy City.