



Twelve-year-old Dany lives with his father, the scholarly Rob Judah, and his silent mother Rachel in the Stoon ghetto on the outskirts of Gottika. Under the harsh regime of Count Pol life keeps getting harder until Gol, a magical creature in human form, arrives. Could Gol become both the brother that Dany has always wanted and the protector of the Stoons? With the help of his unlikely companion he starts to understand the sacred mysteries of life itself.

Compelling, clever, and full of twists, *Gottika* reimagines the powerful Golem legend as an otherworldly fantasy with a universal message.

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GOTTIKA

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First published in 2020 by Green Bean Books,
c/o Pen & Sword Books Ltd,
47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS
www.greenbeanbooks.com

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ISBN 978-1-78438-575-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data available

Typeset by JCS Publishing Services Ltd, www.jcs-publishing.co.uk
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



The thing I don't like about being a kid is this:

Adults lie to us.

They don't want to scare us with the truth.

Instead, they tell us fairy stories, full of twinkly happily ever afters.

But kids know life isn't fair.

Believe me, we know.

Tomorrow I will leave my childhood behind.

Tomorrow, I will know the truth.

PART I

The holy voice from above went still. In its place, holy letters fell from the heavens into the hearts of those ready to heed them. But many ages have passed since such letters have fallen, and still more that the heavens have remained silent.

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So you probably want to know a little bit about me.

My name is Dany and I'm an only child. But most of us Stoon kids were onlies. None of us was sure why.

We lived in Gottika. Or I suppose I should say, in the shadow-town of Gottika—the favela that had grown up on the southwest edge of the city. Its nickname was the Stews, because we just sat there and stewed, waiting for things to get better.

Inside the Stews, we were pretty much free to live how we wanted. Except for a few things. Like curfew.

By order of Count Pol, the CURFEW will be 9 PM
for all residents. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Council Ruling #42.16, section III of the
Gottikan District Code of Public Order.

Subject to fines and/or punishment
100,000Gs/40 days Noathic Prison.

GOTTIKA

Another rule was that we all had to wear our *beretes*—our red Stoon hats—whenever we left the house. I didn't mind that. When you looked down from my room onto the market square, it was like gazing onto a field of poppies. Not that I'd ever seen real poppies. But it was what I imagined they'd look like. Bright and cheerful, like that.

My father was a scientist, philosopher, and healer. His study was on the top floor of our creaky house. You could almost always find him there, at his desk, surrounded by teetering piles of books, papers, and beakers with gunk at the bottom. His head turtled forward because of all the hours he spent bent over his work. He'd got a permanent squint, too, since he couldn't afford new reading glasses. But he didn't care about that. What he cared about was "advancing the cause of knowledge." If only he could get his stuff published again.

Here's how a typical conversation between my father and me went:

Me: Are you coming down to supper? We've got rice and beans tonight. Again.

Papa: I'll be down in a moment. As soon as I finish this thought.

Me: Riiiiight. (*Sigh*)

My mother was a different story altogether. She suffered from what people around here called "the crying sickness."

In her case, the tears stopped falling when she stopped talking, so it was actually more like a staring sickness. Nowadays, she spent hours staring blindly at a piece of embroidery in her lap, one that hadn't had a new stitch added to it in months. Or she stared out the window, onto the market square. I don't think she imagined poppies there. I don't know what she saw.

A typical conversation with my mom went like this:

Me: Mom? Mom?

Mom: ...

Me: (*Sigh*)

I suppose, in a way, you could say all three of us suffered from the staring sickness.