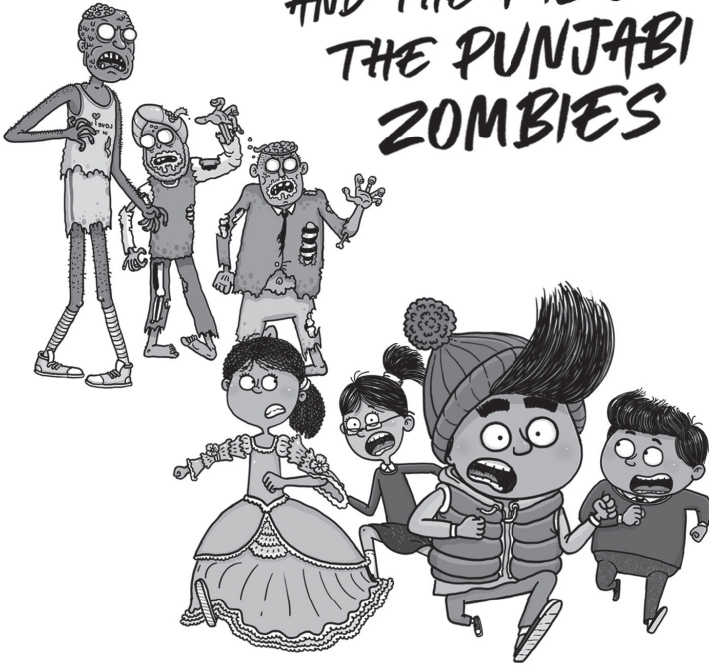


# LITTLE BADMAN

AND THE RISE OF  
THE PUNJABI  
ZOMBIES



**HUMZA ARSHAD & HENRY WHITE**

Illustrated by **ALEKSEI BITSKOFF**



**PUFFIN**

## CHAPTER TWO

# BIG SCHOOL

‘What do you mean we ain’t in the same class?’ I yelled. ‘You’ve made a mistake, look again.’

We were standing in the long brownish-yellow hallway of the main school building, talking to the secretary. Her desk had been dragged out here especially, and was stacked tall with papers and info to help get us Year Sevens settled in. Umer and Wendy had already been handed their paperwork and were hanging about nearby. Behind me there stretched a long line of kids still waiting to find out which tutor groups they were in.

‘I’m afraid not,’ said the secretary, looking at

me over her big red pointy glasses. ‘You’re with Dr Bristlewick in T1, and your friends here are in Y2 with Mrs Halibut.’

‘No way!’ I yelled. ‘That ain’t right. We’re meant to be together. We’ve always been together!’

‘Well, you’re in secondary school now, so there’ll be some changes. I’m sure you’ll still have a few classes with one another.’

‘Let me see that list!’ I demanded, snatching the sheet of paper she was holding.

‘Hey! Give that back!’ she cried.

‘Look,’ I said, pointing. ‘You ain’t ticked this kid’s name yet. Igor Paterson. Just swap me with him and we ain’t got a problem.’

‘I can’t swap names, that’s not how it works,’ she barked, grabbing the list.

‘Fine, then I’ll just have to swap *my* name,’ I told her. ‘From now on, call me Igor Paterson.’

‘But *I’m* Igor Paterson,’ said a boy behind me with a runny nose.

‘Shut up, Igor Paterson,’ I snapped. ‘Your name’s Humza Khan now. Deal with it.’

‘Enough,’ said the secretary. ‘You’re in T1 and that’s the end of it!’

‘This ain’t fair, man!’ I told her. ‘You can’t stick me by myself.’

‘You won’t be by yourself. I’m sure there will be other boys and girls from your old school in there with you.’

‘I don’t care. I just want to hang out with my friends!’

Umer and Wendy were both looking pretty upset too. But at least they still had each other. Why was I being singled out?

‘Look,’ said the secretary, starting to sound real irritated. ‘It’s been arranged. I can’t do anything about it. You’ll be late if you don’t hurry up. Now go to class. Here’s your map.’

She handed me a map of the school, just like the one she’d given the others. Everything was labelled, like where to find my locker, where to head for my classes, and the location of my tutor group – on the far side of the school from Umer and Wendy’s!

‘This can’t be right,’ I muttered as I walked away from the desk, past all the students still waiting in the line.

‘It’ll be OK,’ said Umer, putting his hand on my shoulder.

‘For you two maybe, but I’m on my own. This sucks.’

‘Sorry, Humza,’ said Wendy, and she looked properly sad.

I knew it wasn’t their fault, but I still felt kind of angry. Like *I’d* been cheated and they hadn’t. I was gonna be by myself all year now.

‘You’ll make new friends,’ said Umer, as though he was reading my mind.

‘I don’t want to make new friends!’ I yelled. ‘I’ve got friends already. This is so unfair.’

I just wanted things to be like they had been last year. Big school sucked.

Ten minutes later, I pushed open the door to the classroom marked on my map. There were kids

all over and most of the seats were already taken. I spotted a few faces from primary school, but there were lots of new ones too. I'd never normally sit at the front, but there weren't many options left, so I grabbed a chair near the teacher's desk.

'Good morning, class,' came a voice from the door.

I turned to see a chubby, ancient-looking guy in a light-coloured suit and old-fashioned hat walking into the room. He took off the hat and placed it on top of a head-shaped statue sitting on his desk.

'My name is Dr Bristlewick,' he continued, turning to write something on the board, 'and I will be your form tutor *and* your history teacher.'



Damn, I could see why this guy taught history. He'd probably seen most of it. Dude looked old. Old enough to have retired twenty years ago. He had tiny round glasses perched on the end of his nose, and funny tufts of white hair twirling away from his ears. He was bald on top, but made up for it by having a curly white moustache and a mess of white hair at the back. He kinda looked like a police artist's sketch of Albert Einstein if they hadn't been concentrating very hard.

When he turned back to face us, I could see that he'd written 'Dr Bristlewick' on the whiteboard in big red letters.

'So . . . uh . . . which is it?' I said raising my hand a bit. 'Are you a teacher or a doctor?'

'Both,' he replied, with a smile. 'But it's a very good question. I'm not the kind of doctor that heals people. It just means I'm a qualified expert in my field.'

'Oh, right,' I said. 'Like Dr Dre?'

'I don't know his work,' replied Dr Bristlewick, looking puzzled. 'Is he a historian?'

‘No, he’s a rapper,’ I explained. ‘Like me.’

As I said it, there was laughter from around the room. I realized kids were looking over at me now. Suddenly I just wanted to disappear. I don’t even know why I’d said that.

‘I see,’ replied Dr Bristlewick. ‘Well, I’m sure this Dr Dre is very good at what he does. Now, time for the register.’

He began to call the names as I put my head in my hands.

When registration was done, we were sent off to our next lesson, which for me was maths. Normally I hated maths, but I swear I’d never been so happy to enter a classroom. There at a table near the back were Umer and Wendy. I ran straight over.

‘Hey, guys!’ I said. ‘This is great! We’ve got maths together!’

‘Hey, Humza,’ said Umer with a big grin.

‘How was your tutor group?’ asked Wendy.

‘Fine, I guess,’ I replied. ‘Though my tutor’s so old he doesn’t know if he’s a teacher or a doctor.’



Squeeze up so I can sit down.’

‘Uh, I think these are just two-person desks, Humza,’ replied Umer.

‘OK, well, where am I gonna sit then?’ I asked.

‘Right there,’ said Wendy, pointing to the next seat over.

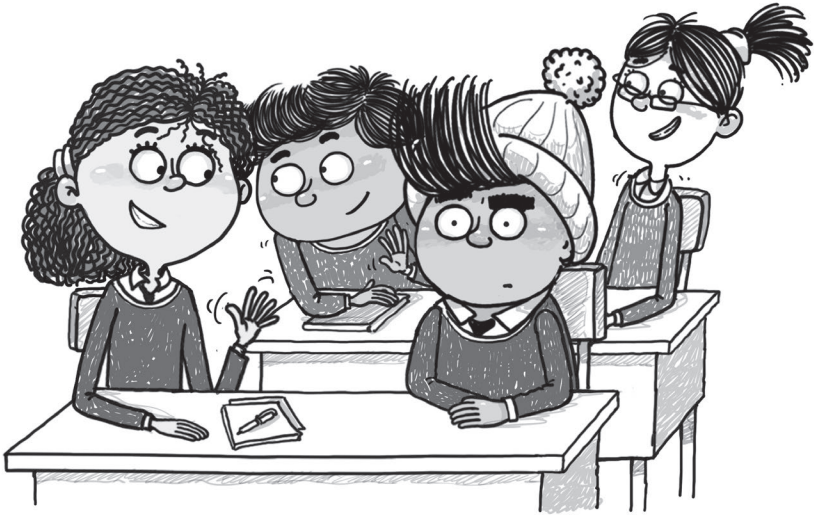
‘Fine,’ I said, and pulled out a chair at the desk next to them.

As soon as I did, a hand reached for the chair beside mine. I glanced up to see who was taking my spare seat.

‘Hello,’ said a girl.

Who the hell was this? Why was she sitting next to me? Couldn’t she see I just wanted to catch up with my mates? Whoever she was, she had big brown eyes and . . . I don’t know . . . a face, I guess. I wasn’t really paying attention. I felt a bit dizzy. I tried to reply but the words didn’t come out like they were meant to.

‘Hurgh,’ I said, as a bit of sick popped up into my mouth.



What the heck was that?! Had I eaten something rotten?! I was gonna have to have serious words with my mum. Sending me to school with food poisoning on day one was bang out of order!

‘Um . . . I’m Aisha,’ said the girl, as she sat down in her seat.

‘Hi, Aisha,’ said Umer, leaning over. ‘I’m Umer and this is Wendy.’

‘Hiya,’ said Wendy.

‘Hi, guys,’ replied Aisha, smiling at them.

‘This is Humza,’ added Umer, with a puzzled look on his face. ‘He’s not normally this quiet.’

‘Eh-heh-heh . . .’ I managed to force out. What the hell was wrong with me? I was already seriously starting not to like this girl. Sitting at *my* desk. Talking to *my* friends. Smelling all weird and nice like that soap shop on the high road. I wish she’d just sit somewhere else, with her long eyelashes and her shampoo-advert hair.

I felt so weird for the entire lesson, I barely got a single answer right on the new starters test. It was totally that girl’s fault! Nothing to do with how good or bad I was at maths. Well . . . maybe a tiny bit. But mostly her.

As soon as the bell rang, I was out of my seat and out the door.

‘What was that all about?’ asked Umer, hurrying after me down the hallway.

‘What you talking about?’ I replied, like I had no idea what he was referring to.

‘You went all weird and quiet in there,’ he added. ‘What’s up?’

‘No I didn’t!’ I snapped. ‘*You* did.’

‘Did I?’ replied Umer, looking puzzled. ‘Oh . . . I hadn’t noticed. Maybe I did.’

‘No, you were fine,’ said Wendy. ‘It was just Humza who was being weird.’

‘I *wasn’t* being weird!’ I yelled. ‘You guys were. Shut up!’

Wendy and Umer gave each other a little look. I kept my head down and shoved open the door to the playground. The cold air felt good. Man, it had been hot in that maths class. That’s probably why I felt strange. Stupid maths. What’s the point of it anyway? If you can’t figure out a problem on your fingers and toes, it ain’t worth worrying about.

‘Hey, look! It’s that famous rapper!’ came a voice as we made our way across the playground.

I glanced over to see who’d said it and realized they were talking about me. The kid who’d spoken wasn’t anyone I’d ever seen before. He was a big kid. A seriously big kid. He was wearing a red tracksuit top over his uniform and had some crazy patterns cut in the side of his hair. He must have been nearly twice my height.

‘Yeah, nice one,’ I said, as we passed, doing my best to keep my head down.

‘You must be pretty good then, if you’re boasting to your class,’ he said, grinning at me. ‘As good as Dr Dre from what I hear.’

His friends began to laugh. Ah, man . . . Someone must have told him what I’d said during registration! He probably had a brother or sister in my tutor group. This just kept getting worse.

‘He’s not just *good*,’ said Umer, ‘he’s amazing. His rapping once saved the whole world!’

‘Umer!’ I hissed, elbowing him in the ribs. ‘Shut up!’

Umer was talking about the time my talent-show rap drove away the alien slugs invading our school. It was hardly the best review of my rapping skills – the first gig I ever did made an entire species leave the planet. Still, I could see he was trying to defend me (even if he was only using the stupid half of his brain to do it). But he’d clearly forgotten that we weren’t meant to discuss the whole alien-invasion thing with anyone. Especially not some

random older kids we'd never met before.

'Saved the world?' said the main kid in the red tracksuit top. 'What's that meant to mean?'

'Don't worry about it,' I told him, and tried to turn to go.

'Don't turn your back on me,' he growled, taking a step towards us. 'What do you call yourself then?'

'Uh . . . Humza,' I replied, knowing it wasn't the answer he was looking for but not wanting to give him the right one.

'No, man,' he said, laughing, 'your MC name. What is it? You can't be a rapper without a proper name.'

'It's . . . um . . . Little Badman,' I replied.

He grinned. Some of his mates began to laugh.

'So, you gonna have a battle with me then, Little Badman?' he asked, still smiling.

'What? Like . . . a *fight*?' I asked, and even I could hear the nervousness in my voice.

'No, not a fight,' he said, with a chuckle. 'A rap battle. Bilal, give us a beat, yeah?'

One of the other kids, Bilal I guess, picked out a track on his mobile.

‘How’s this, JB?’ asked Bilal, who was big, round and wearing sunglasses. A heavy bass began to play from the little set of speakers hanging round his neck. As the beat kicked in, the other big kids began to nod. This was terrible.

‘Come on then, Little Badman,’ said the main kid, who was apparently named JB. ‘You gonna go first, or should I?’

‘Y-y-you can . . .’ I stammered.

‘All right then,’ said JB, grinning.

Wendy leaned in towards me. ‘Are you OK?’ she whispered.

‘I just wanna get out of here,’ I whispered back.

But what could I do? We were surrounded now. There was no escape. One way or another, I was about to have my first rap battle . . .