


ALAN GRATZ

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of **REFUGEE** and **HEROES**

# WAR GAMES

A NOVEL OF 1936 BERLIN



A black and white photograph of a large crowd gathered in a square between two tall, narrow towers. The Olympic rings are superimposed above the text.

# WAR GAMES



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ALAN GRATZ

# WAR GAMES

Scholastic Press / New York

# For my friend and fellow gamer Andrew Hart



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# TELL NO ONE

Trumpets blared. Bells rang out. Beyond the mouth of the dark tunnel, a hundred thousand voices roared.

I took a deep breath as the team from Turkey marched out ahead of us, and we moved up to take their place. The US team had waited a long time for our big moment. We were about to walk in the Parade of Nations at the Opening Ceremonies of the 1936 Olympics. Alphabetically, we were third from last among the forty-nine countries here to compete in Berlin.

I looked around at my fellow US athletes. Swimmers, boxers, wrestlers, field hockey players, pentathletes—more than three hundred of us stood ready to enter the Olympiastadion, the outdoor arena that would be the main sports venue for the next

sixteen days. I hung out near the other athletes on the US women's gymnastics team.

"I'm getting chills," I said. "Anybody else getting chills?"

The seven other gymnasts were huddled together, buzzing with energy. The girl closest to me nodded, then turned her back on me again.

My lips thinned. My teammates had all trained at the same East Coast gym. I was the lone outsider, all the way from California. Worse, I had beaten out one of their friends to make the team. Ever since then, they had given me the cold shoulder.

*Fine, I thought. I'm here to win gold. I don't need friends for that.*

"Am I late?" Mary Brooks asked, swanning in like she was showing up to a fancy party. She took my arm, and I smiled despite myself. I didn't need friends, but I'd made one on the ship to Germany without even trying.

"Fashionably late, as always," I said. "We're about to walk out."

"Then I'm right on time," Mary said.

"Not going to stand with the rest of the equestrian team?" I asked.

"Those sticks in the mud?" Mary said.

"Mary Brooks! Mary Brooks!" my gymnastics teammates cried. They crowded around her, shining their attention on her the way they never had with me. I couldn't begrudge them too

much. Mary Brooks was an Olympic athlete *and* a Hollywood movie star. A real one! After she'd won an equestrian gold medal at sixteen, Mary and her horse, Abyssinia, had starred in half a dozen Hollywood Westerns. I'd seen her last picture, *Moonlight on the Prairie*, in a theater back home. Now she was my best friend and roommate on the US team. I still couldn't believe it.

It sure was nice to have a little *good* luck for a change.

"Isn't this thrilling, Miss Brooks?" one of the gymnasts asked.

"It must be like walking the red carpet!" said another.

Mary smiled and nodded, then turned her back on the girls. I saw their faces drop as she led me away.

"A little taste of their own medicine," Mary whispered. "I see how they treat you, Evie. Your teammates need to learn that looking out for other people gets you much further in life than looking out for yourself."

Mary had been looking out for me since we left New York. She'd said I reminded her of the first time she'd gone to the Olympics alone as a teenager, and she had immediately taken me under her wing. I'd bristled at first. I didn't need anyone else's help—I'd been taking care of myself for a while now. But it was nice to have a friend I wasn't competing with.

"Ugh. These uniforms," Mary said, fiddling with her buttons. All the US women athletes wore the same outfit: a blue jacket, white blouse, white skirt, and red-ribboned straw hat. I knew Mary was used to wearing expensive designer gowns. For



me, the US gymnastics dress uniform was the nicest set of clothes I'd ever owned. The boater hat alone was the kind of thing I could only have afforded to buy secondhand, a couple years after it was out of fashion. If ever.

I put my hands in my jacket pockets, and my fingers touched the mysterious folded-up note I carried with me. I'd been so excited about the Opening Ceremonies that I'd forgotten it was there.

"Nervous?" Mary asked, misreading my frown for anxiety.

"I—yes," I said.

One of the athletes standing in front of us, a young Black man on the track-and-field team, overheard our conversation and looked back.

"What's your name, kid?" he asked me.

"Evie?" I squeaked, turning my own name into a question. I knew *his* name—he was Jesse Owens, the biggest star on all of Team USA. Owens was lean and compact, with short-cropped hair and a big smile. Last year he'd set four world records in a single college track meet, and everybody was expecting him to break a bunch more records here.

Out of all the athletes the United States had sent to the Berlin Olympics, only eighteen of them—sixteen men, and two women—were Black, like Jesse Owens. Most of the others were white, like me and Mary and my gymnastics teammates.

I cleared my throat. "I'm Evie Harris," I said, doing better

the second time. "It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Owens."

Another Black sprinter nudged him and laughed. "*Mister Owens!* Dang, kid, how old are you?"

"Thirteen," I said, standing up straighter. "I'm a gymnast."

"Well, I tell you what, *Miss Harris*," Owens said, gently mimicking my politeness. He pointed up, where we could hear the chanting, clapping, stomping German crowd in the stands. "You keep your eyes on the prize and don't let all this other business distract you, and you'll take home the gold."

Owens didn't understand. Neither did Mary. I *had* my eyes on the prize. I was totally focused on winning a gold medal in gymnastics. And I knew I could do it. The real reason I was nervous was the note in my pocket. The note that someone had slid under the door of my room at the Olympic Village that morning. I didn't have to pull it out again to know what it said. I'd memorized it:

*If you want to take home the gold, come alone to the Maiden Bridge on the Spreekanal tonight after the Opening Ceremonies. Tell no one.*

Who'd written it? Who'd put it under my door? What did it *mean*? I definitely wanted to take home the gold, but couldn't I do that all by myself? And what was so secret that I couldn't tell anyone else about it?

The only thing I knew for sure was that the note was meant for me alone. Even though it had been delivered by

hand, the envelope was addressed to *Evelyn Harris, Bakersfield, California, General Delivery.*

Which meant that whoever wrote that note knew me better than anybody here. Even Mary.

“United States!” someone yelled. “You’re up!”

“Showtime,” said Mary.

Jesse Owens smiled. “Let’s go make history.”

# GERMANY ABOVE ALL

We moved as a team out of the darkness of the tunnel and into the blazing electric white lights of the arena. I blinked for a few seconds, raising my hand against the glare. Then, as my eyes adjusted, I gaped.

Berlin's Olympiastadion was the biggest building I'd ever been in. The Olympic Stadium was a gigantic concrete oval, with two tiers of stands around a central field. One end of the oval was open, like a hole punched in the top of an egg, and in that empty space sat a big iron cauldron. At the other end of the oval, the Olympic rings hung in the air between two huge columns. There must have been wires holding the rings up, but from where I stood, they looked like they were floating.

“Gonna be hard to go back to Bakersfield after this,” I murmured to myself.

The grass infield held a full orchestra *and* all the athletes from the forty-five different countries who’d marched in ahead of us. Some of the team uniforms, I noticed, were fun nods to traditional clothing: The French team wore blue berets, the Egyptian team wore fezzes, and the Mexican team wore sombreros. Most teams, though, like mine, went with the double-breasted suits and straw boater hats that were all the rage back home.

A hearty roar rose from the German audience as we circled the track, and I smiled. For some reason, the Germans loved us. Especially Jesse Owens. Teenage girls rushed him for autographs wherever we went. They even snipped off bits of his clothes with scissors as souvenirs! Now, over the music and the applause, I could hear people chanting his name, turning the *W* in *Owens* into a *V*, the way it was pronounced in German. “OH-SENS! OH-SENS!” Owens was playing it cool, but I could see a little spring in his step. Who wouldn’t want to be a star? I sure did.

“It’s like being onstage,” Mary whispered to me, as if reading my thoughts. “And look.” She pointed to the sky, where the *Hindenburg*, the giant German airship, flew overhead. I whistled in wonder. The *Hindenburg* was as long as the Empire State Building was tall. Olympic rings were painted on its belly, and the red-white-and-black swastika symbol of Nazi Germany decorated its tail fins.

Swastika flags hung from every building in Berlin, but it was strange to see one here that wasn't being carried by Germany's athletes. The Olympics were supposed to be a place where politics didn't matter. But the Nazi flag on the airship overhead was a reminder of all the stuff that was going on *outside* the stadium.

Back home, you couldn't turn on the radio without hearing news about Germany gearing up to go to war again. They *weren't* at war with anybody right now. Germany wasn't even supposed to have an army, not after losing the Great War in 1918. But they had raised an army anyway—a big one—and a few months ago had marched across the Rhine River and retaken a big piece of land from France that had originally been part of Germany. Everybody was really upset about it. Except for the German people, of course. For them it was a huge victory, and their enthusiasm for the Nazi Party and its swastika flag had reached a fever pitch. Me? I didn't care too much about any of it. I was just here to take home the gold.

*If you want to take home the gold, come alone to the Maiden Bridge on the Spreekanal tonight after the Opening Ceremonies. Tell no one.*

I pushed away the thought of the note as I rounded the turn in the track. There, in a private box halfway up the stadium, I spotted the man who had orchestrated Germany's great comeback: Adolf Hitler.



I'd seen Hitler in the newsreels they showed before movies, bigger than life, barking German into a microphone as tens of thousands of uniformed followers raised their right arms in the Nazi salute. Here and now, surrounded by other Nazi bigwigs and Olympic officials, he looked smaller. More weaselly. He had a pointy nose, a tiny mustache, and oily black hair combed down at a sharp angle across his big white forehead. He wore a suit and tie, with a couple of military medals on his jacket and a red Nazi armband on his sleeve.

"*That's* the guy all these people are crazy about?" Owens said.

"If it *is* him," said Mary.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard the rumors, darling? Hitler has a double. Maybe more than one!"

"Because there's a lot of people who'd like to see him dead," said Owens.

That surprised me. I'd heard that Adolf Hitler had said some pretty hateful things, but I hadn't paid much attention. Who despised him enough to kill him? The French maybe, because he'd taken land from them. But hadn't that land been Germany's to begin with? I couldn't think of anybody else Hitler had hurt bad enough to want him dead.

Whoever the man in the box was, we had to act like he was the real Hitler. It was tradition at the Opening Ceremonies for

the athletes to give the head of the host country the Olympic salute, but there was a problem. Before the games, Germany had asked all the Olympic athletes to give Hitler the *Nazi* salute as we passed. Some countries agreed, but there was no way *we* were going to do that. Not the United States. Giving the Olympic salute was fine, but we didn't give foreign leaders their own salutes.

Unfortunately, the Olympic salute looked an awful lot like the Nazi salute, so we didn't want to do that either. There'd been a lot of talk on the ship over to Germany about what to do, but nobody had made any kind of decision. Now here we were, about to pass Hitler, and it would be a huge insult to Germany and the games if we did *nothing*.

Up ahead, one of the guys on the rowing team whipped off his straw hat and put it over his heart, and very quickly the rest of us followed suit. It seemed like the perfect solution—a way to show respect for a foreign leader, but not salute him like we had any kind of loyalty to him. Our flag bearer kept the Stars and Stripes held high too.

We heard whistles from a few corners of the stadium—in Europe, fans whistled instead of booing when they were unhappy—but my chest swelled with pride. The United States didn't lower our flag for anybody else's, and we didn't salute anyone else's flag either. We knew who we were, and stayed true to ourselves.

Cheers drowned out the whistles as the German team emerged from the tunnel a couple of teams behind us. The host country was always the last onto the field, no matter where they fell in the alphabet.

If I had thought the roar was loud in the stadium before, now it was *deafening*. The orchestra broke out into the German national anthem, and suddenly a hundred thousand voices sang as one: “*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt!*”

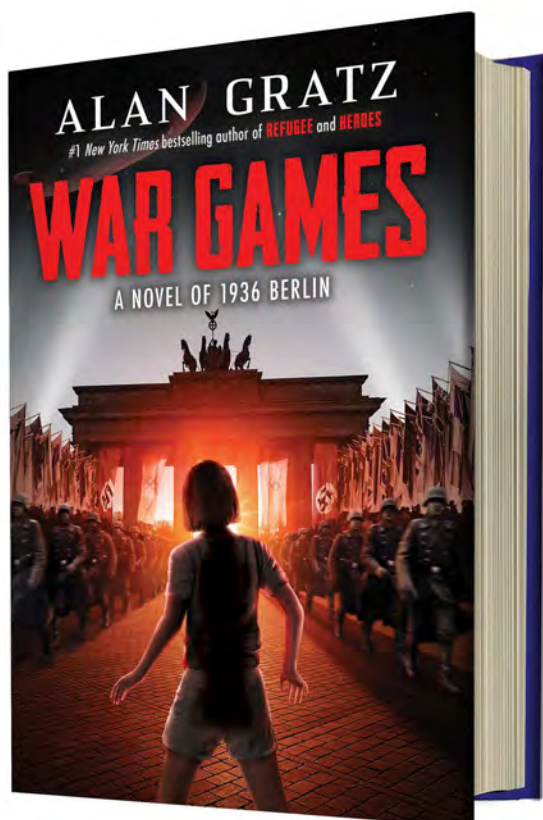
I’d been in Germany long enough to have heard it before, and to know what they were saying:

*Germany, Germany, above all, above all in the world!*

It was a little unfair that Germany was the only country that got their anthem played, but it was amazing to see an entire stadium full of people cheering and saluting and singing. My skin tingled with the spectacle of it. But as the song went on, and all the salutes swung toward Adolf Hitler like the needles on a compass, that tingle turned into a creeping prickle on the back of my neck. There was something not quite right. Something about this moment felt fake, but also frighteningly real. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but it was definitely there. Something low and persistent, like the drone of the *Hindenburg* underneath all the cheering.

What was so wrong here? And what was I not seeing?

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