

Years 7 & 8

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Controlled

Bleak grey clouds speckled the gloomy sky as Finn Clarkson took a turn on his longboard past 56th street. Monotone torrents of rain barraged the many brutalist concrete buildings, refusing to give way to the sun. He would have loved to use his outlawed Quick-Step ability to get to the Underground quickly, but I.R.I.S had other ideas. They had banned all forms of Magick, creating a shadow of oppression over Blackwood City's thriving population. Finn pulled up his hood and kicked along the gravel faster as he passed a guard in official I.R.I.S uniform who was throttling an old man on the pavement. His screams of agony and pleas of mercy were almost too much for Finn, he bared his teeth but restrained himself from intervening, out of pure desire for survival. Even if you were caught with half a drop of Magick blood in your system, you were shipped away to the cold, clammy cells of I.R.I.S's complex of detention centres and prisons. The man behind it all: Dr. Reuben Dvorak. A sadistic, cold-hearted man, he was the bane of almost all citizens of Blackwood city, Magick or not. He had become so hated, that his name had become somewhat of a pejorative term. Born with the ability to control the soul, he had badly misused it, and as punishment, had all the Magick stripped from him by the Higher Entities. Finn eased his board into a slow pace, and rounding the last turn, he jumped off it and entered the blaring, neon underworld that was the underground.

Finn slowly pulled down his hood and smiled as he strolled through the densely packed alleyways of the underground. It was always like walking into an alternate universe. Merchandise from the many stores spilled onto the walkways, as the hustle and bustle were accentuated with the scent of diesel that hung in the air like smog. Faint, thudding heavy metal music leaked from live bars, rattling the thin rafters as Finn opened the rusted door into the Weak Shot Café. Six people waited anxiously for him at a peeling, bent table, whispering quietly together. Across Blackwood City, the many Magick users had formed factions of outlaws and met in the underground for decades. Finn's faction had known each other since birth, when I.R.I.S hadn't existed, and there was no aura of danger lingering in the air. As Alan, a Firestarter; Devansh, a Zeus; Sarge, a Sage, and the brothers and Hydrokinetics Dave and Manuel beckoned him over, Finn immediately knew that something was wrong. The brothers gave Finn small, nervous waves as he approached the table. The oldest of the lot, Sarge, gently tapped Finn on the shoulder, pointing to the front page of a copy of the Daily News. The headline seemed to scream at Finn, 'Crackdown ordered on all Magick users. Large sums of money offered as rewards for information regarding whereabouts.' The realisation dawned over Finn like a raincloud as his faction reaffirmed that they would have to flee the city in haste. "No way," he muttered absently.

"Yes way," replied Sarge. "We're going to have to run. NOW. They're already sending troops of guards OUR way."

They all started off in different directions, farewelling each other and disappearing into the various dank alleyways of Blackwood City.

Finn gazed at the ceiling in a cosy bed as a fireplace crackled comfortingly not far off. He lifted his head and realised that a kindly old man was by his side.

"Hello," he spoke. "I found you by the door, so I brought you inside."

Suddenly, all of Finn's memories came rushing back like a waterfall. Crawling through the back-alleys, collapsing in front of a house . . .

"Thank you," he managed to croak, as the man passed him a bowl of soup. As he took a sip, the warm sensation enveloped him in comfort until he fell to the floor with a dull thud – out cold once again.

Groggily, Finn rubbed his eyes as he became accustomed to the darkness he was in. Mustering his strength, Finn struggled in chains as he tried to break free. He realised that his faction was all in restraints as well, with similar contraptions placed on their heads, beeping and clicking as multicoloured tubing flickered with a sick, fluorescent light. Just then, the man Finn least wanted to see entered the room. Dr. Dvorak. The black angel himself. He smirked at the sight of Finn baring his teeth.

"Well, hello there. I am absolutely delighted to have you here," he spoke, with a generous dollop of sarcasm and insult spread thickly across his voice.

"I have been using the machines on your heads to drain every single ounce of Magick out of every one of its users and shipping them off to the slammer. All except for you. You lot were hard to find." He scoffed in shattered humour.

"You absolute monster!" hissed Finn as he clenched his fists, fingernails drawing crimson blood from his palms, temples pulsing in fury. Dr Dvorak simply smirked.

"Oh really? I must say that I am really doing Blackwood City a huge favour. Your kind have been contaminating the city's pureness for centuries, and someone must do something about it, am I right?"

The air seemed to grow frigid for a few seconds, as Finn's heartbeat thudded aggressively. Thudding. Thudding. Thudding some more. Something snapped. Loudly. Ears ringing. Vision blurring. Anger taking over. Mustering all his Magick in fury, he let out a piercing battle cry, burst from his chains, and tackled the doctor to the cold floor. Guards leapt from their posts and began viciously smashing Finn with their batons, the doctor crawling out from underneath him.

"I stand corrected . . ." he cackled. The doctor clicked his fingers, and three columns of cold metal emerged slowly in the distance as the ceiling opened with a giant screech. The guards followed suit. Coughing bloody phlegm, Finn leaned against Alan and Devansh as they helped him walk away.

Finally recovering from his bloody beating, Finn formed a huddle with his faction.

"Alright guys," he began. "We don't have much power, but you guys are gonna need to think strategically. Remember, the robots are Magick too. So, if you know your weaknesses, you know theirs."

They all nodded as they sprinted out from the walls and prepared to face the robots. Legs of metal with immense girth marched towards them as the faction looked up in horror. Nonetheless, they threw wave after wave of their abilities at the robots, pouring their hearts out in angst. As they tired themselves out, they realised that attack was futile. Dr. Dvorak had conjured all the Magick he had extracted to create the robots. By his sides, his comrades were weakening. As a blow from a robot nearly decapitated Finn, Sarge flew back by a kick from another.

"NO!" screamed Finn as he ran towards Sarge.

“Finn, use your youth wisely. Don’t worry about an old codger like me,” he whispered. “Now go.”

Finn wept as Sarge took his last breaths and lay in peace.

“Know your weaknesses!” he shouted at his comrades, reeling from his profound loss. Gathering up their courage, they charged at the robots with whatever they could get their hands on, screaming ferally, the distance between them and the robots disappearing. In one final wave of bravery, they attacked together, grappling the robot’s bodies, hacking at the metal, and clambering up their arms. The robot’s machinery gave out groans, as their injured brains forced them to stumble around. In one final movement, they collapsed over each other onto the top of I.R.I.S headquarters, creating a gargantuan mushroom cloud of ignited dust. Finn and his friends fell through the sky, time slowing down as they tumbled down together, like falling cherry blossom.

“Well,” he chuckled. “At least we got to go skydiving . . .”

They all smiled weakly as they thudded into the remains of robots, their bodies burying themselves under the rubble. The citizens of Blackwood city walked out of their homes as a wave of silence settled over the countless skyscrapers, ash and ashes raining down like black rain.

The rescue workers packed up their equipment, scattering away from the collapsed ruins of the I.R.I.S headquarters, as black limousines crawled slowly along singed tarmac towards the City Hall. Hundreds of mourners in all black dress trudged along the sidewalk, following the cars. The hastily elected mayor tapped together the papers of her speech as she glanced out of the window at the rubble.

Somewhere beneath all that, she thought, our heroes lie.

A tear rolled down her cheek, thinking of the young men who had given up their lives to protect the city they knew and loved. The people filled up the town hall as the Mayor strode out towards the lectern.

“Ahem,” she spoke into the microphone. “As you know, last week, on that fateful Wednesday, seven young men gave up their lives to make sure we lived ours in peace. Their names were Finn Clarkson, Alan Rodgers, Devansh Patel, Samuel ‘Sarge’ Crothers, and Dave and Manuel Moore. Together, they helped free us from the cruel dictatorship led by I.R.I.S.”

The Mayor continued to read her speech to a crowd of grateful citizens, who listened intently, mourning.

“In memoriam, the ruins of the I.R.I.S headquarters will be converted into a park that will be named after the brave souls who secured us our freedom.”

The citizens applauded as one like the deafening roar of a lion. Somewhere above in the air, Finn and his brethren smiled as they looked down over the city.