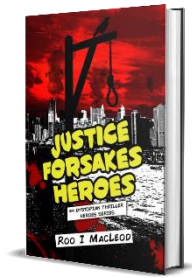


Justice Forsakes Heroes

#4 Dystopian Thriller Heroes Story

Roo I MacLeod



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Justice Forsakes Heroes

#4 Dystopian Thriller Heroes Series

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Part i

Incarceration

A random Friday in December

Late in the New Millennium

Street Boy Suffers

Ceiling lights glared at the angry crimson streak cut across the Street Boy's back. Blood masked his contorted features. Heavy, rust-red chains stretched long limbs high, leaving his toes to scrabble at the earth floor. White noise blaring from the speakers on the walls deadened the low moan emanating from deep in his gut.

Street Boy squirmed and swung and swayed above the mud, desperate to face the mirror. He wanted to be front and center, to display the blood and the bruising and to show the defiant dragon tattoos painted along the right and left forearms. Round and round, clenching and relaxing, but he ached, every muscle torn and wasted.

'Bastards.' He spat at the window. The word, once angry and hourly, lacked conviction. A sob followed.

His only salvation was the large black spider living in the corner above the mirror. It didn't move, but the spider offered comfort. 'Are you dead?' Insects, minute midge type beasts became stuck in the small broken web, squirming in panic and disappearing. The damn spider was eating well.

The door banged open. A draft of warm air enveloped his naked frame. Rattling the chains and rolling his body, he endeavored to face the intruder. Pain gripped and twisted, and a spasm caused him to cry out.

'Not happy, Mr. Jackman?'

Street Boy, with a final twist, faced the tall interrogator in the army greens. He knew this man with the buzz cut and the big black boots. Every day Street Boy tried to spit on the

shiny leather, aiming for the gleaming toe of the boot, but always fell short. A beating followed, always, but some days, thrashings accompanied every breath inhaled. Bloodied saliva pooled in his cheeks. He sniffed to draw phlegm, to give the spittle more body.

‘Don’t.’ The voice sounded tired.

The aim was always too low. The inaccuracy caused by a lack of height and arc to the expulsion. As the truncheon rose, Ben spat. The trajectory was right. The direction spot on. Swiveling from the soldier’s anger, Street Boy rejoiced at the sound of the spit hitting the mark and splattering over the toes of the black shiny boots.

‘That was my dad.’

The spider didn’t reply.

‘He held me when I was born, at arm’s length, like I was dirty or diseased. Aunt Agnes said he grimaced and shoved me at Mum and grunted. No contact, physical or emotional since.

‘No hugs.

‘Not even a handshake.’

The chains, loosened for no reason, allowed Street Boy to sit on the muddy floor. He faced the mirror, scratching at the dirt, building piles to throw at the glass mirror.

‘Now you might think I’m being obstinate, but I don’t know what they want.’

He shook his head and shrugged. ‘I don’t know.’ The voice was loud but emotionless. ‘Mum will have your arse when she realizes what you’re doing.’

He rested against the chair. A sigh sounded because he knew his mother didn’t care or feel a need to inform anyone about her son’s treatment. His mother gave up on him years ago.

He looked away from the mirror and looked at the web in the corner. ‘Have you been forgotten?’ The spider didn’t move. ‘I got a little mate called Harry. He’d like you. He likes critters, but mainly frogs. Harry’s not talking to me because I didn’t save his mum. He saves me, eh, when I’m in trouble. All the time. But she got blown up, and I could’ve done something. Anything. Sometimes I wished I’d just hugged her body and gone boom. That’s what people wanted. Serious.

‘And there’s a girl. Well, she doesn’t think she’s a girl. But is she a woman? When do you move on from child to adult, eh? I mean folk call me Street Boy, but I’m not a boy. Not really.

‘Anyway, about the girl—’ Cramp caused his leg to spasm. He stretched the limb and quelled the cry. A tear appeared and fell to his cheek. ‘She’s forgotten her Street Boy. No card or cake with a file baked inside. Not even a note saying *hi, missing you* or something similar. But nothing.’

Street Boy rolled over and drew his knees close. ‘It doesn’t matter. It’s best she keeps away. Most girls I fancy turn up dead. Serious.’

‘We don’t have space for your kind.’

The chains stretched above his head once more. His toes could touch the dirt floor but lacked traction.

‘Austerity is the new order. We’ve been paying for you twats with your highbrow liberal ideas for too long. It’s over. Either you contribute, or you’re left behind.’

ErmeY walked the room, slapping at his khaki combat trousers with a riding crop. ErmeY, Sergeant ErmeY. Wormey, Street Boy called him. ErmeY the Wormey liked to hurt the Street Boy.

‘But you live because your dad is important. It don’t seem right, but you got something we want. Well, he wants. The Clan wants. And it don’t seem right you won’t tell us where the file is.’

The riding crop flicked from behind and caught Street Boy’s testicles. He couldn’t withhold the cry.

‘You took this file from the house. The neighbor is insistent about the facts. You took the file. After two men were killed. Two good men. We can forget the deaths, but we can’t forget the file. We want it back. The file means nothing to you. Just give it back.’

Street Boy sniffed and sucked at the saliva pooling in his mouth. He tried to swing to face ErmeY, but he’d lost the strength to move.

‘It was your grandfather, wasn’t it? He drove you back to Ostere.’

Street Boy’s mouth gaped, a drool of bloodied saliva spilling onto his chin. His grandfather had died in the escape from Old London Town. The army caught them as they attempted to cross the border from Old London Town into the Western Sector. His grandfather crashed the jeep and died in a ball of flame. Thinking about his grandfather, the risk taken to save him, saddened Street Boy. He swished the thick bloody fluid from cheek to cheek.

‘Does he have the file?’

Street Boy jerked and swiveled and ignored the searing pain in his arms. As he swung within reach, he spat high and cried out as the bloodied spit hit Erney on the colors over his left tit.

In the substation of the Ostere police force, a prostitute pleaded rape while peeing in the jail cells sink. 'That Black Jack,' she said. Her hand held the skirt free of the flow. 'That dead twat, he raped me he did.'

She dropped to the floor and strutted forward, her skirt riding high, and rattled the iron gate. 'That plastic purple-black poof dipped his wick, he did, while I slept.'

Constable Barney Baker stood at the reception counter dealing with an informant, ignoring the language from the cell.

'I saw him honest. I saw that Street Boy, for sure.' The man couldn't stop scratching at his arms, and when he gave that a break, he was running his blackened nails through long, lank hair.

PSO Webster stood at the water cooler filling her drink bottle, her attention snared by the vagrant's confession. She knew him from the squat in the disused Bakers factory, off Ostere lane. The chances of his information being credible was slim. His need for the cash reward, the hunger for something to ingest or smoke greater than any form of truth.

Wynona Webster heard many reports on Street Boy's whereabouts, her sources on the street relaying rumors and murmurs, but so far, the boy remained hidden.

'Out by the Blacksmiths, he was.' The large, jaundiced eyes pleaded with the copper to listen and believe. 'It was a gunfight like the olden days. There was Black Hats and Top Hats, a copper or two, and that Street Boy.'

Old news to Webster. She'd been there, but she didn't remember the vagrant.

'Why here?' Baker said. 'This isn't the East End.'

'Like I give a crap, but that Street Boy shot a bloke wearing a big old stove hat.'

'So, where'd he go?'

The camera above the counter panned the room and caused the informant to leer and turn his face toward the innards of the station. He locked eyes with Wynona, blinked, scratched

at his face before continuing. 'I don't know, like,' he said to Wynona. 'He was sat on that sofa by the blacksmith's fire with another bloke, the pair of 'em just chilling.'

'A name?' Baker said.

'Tommy. Tommy, the Car.'

'So, he witnessed what happened?'

'No, that was later. He didn't see the shootings. Don't you be giving the wedge of cash reward to that Tommy, the Car. It was me who saw Street Boy get nicked. These big old boys bundled him into the back of a truck, gave him a slap before they ground gears and burned rubber heading north.'

Constable Baker tapped a pen on the pad at his fingertips. He looked at Wynona, but she watched the vagrant.

'Anything else you want to add?' she asked.

'It was his dad that took him.'

'Dad?' Baker stopped tapping and Wynona's bottle lowered. 'What do you mean?' Baker asked. 'How do you know it was his dad?'

'Coz he said, "Dad." I heard him, clear as.'

Baker reached over the counter and grabbed the man by the throat. PSO Webster, pointing with her water bottle, turned to Barney. 'So, his dad knows where the Street Boy is hidden?'

Baker kept his hand to the informant's throat. The face turned crimson, and the mouth gaped like a beached guppy. 'No,' Baker said. 'Everyone has something on the Street Boy. Every day someone new comes in wanting to report a sighting. Someone's told the world there's a reward, and every bum in Ostere gets memory recall and knows Street Boy's whereabouts. But for the record, right, I'll write it up.'

Wynona sipped as Baker escorted the guest past the cell. The girl crying rape reached and hissed at the man. The front door to the station eased open, and a boy, hoody shrouding his face, stumbled into the foyer and stopped.

'Harry,' Wynona said.

She blocked Harry from Baker's view. Barney Baker wanted the Street Boy found. All day and night he obsessed over finding Street Boy, but Harry was an equal prize. A warrant stood for Harry's arrest concerning murders committed in Ostere and the attempt on the King's life. She didn't trust the man to treat Harry fairly. Wynona grabbed Harry's arm and escorted him from the building.

‘What are you doing here? You’re wanted as an accessory, a witness, and God knows what else. The Clan is gung-ho to have your throat garroted, and God knows what Barney might do if he finds out you’re here. And you walk into a police station like—’

‘Your police station.’ A girl leaned against the front wall, dressed in school uniform with a calf length dark blue skirt, white shirt, and a blue bib covered in small badges.

‘Who are you?’

‘She’s me new sister. That’s Sal. She made me come.’

‘Why?’

‘Harry has news.’

‘I can tell the story, like.’ His hands dug deep into his pockets, and his foot nudged a battered can.

‘Well, tell the news,’ Sal said. ‘The copper’s right. You can’t get caught here.’

Harry kicked the crumpled can and sent it spinning into the wheel of a parked cop car. ‘You was wanting info on Street Boy,’ he said. He looked at Wynona, chewing on his cheek, keeping her waiting. ‘We’ve found him.’

Wynona looked from the girl to Harry. He wasn’t smiling. The girl nodded to confirm the news.

‘Where?’

‘In a building behind that new housing complex that’s been half finished forever,’ she said.

‘It’s a factory, like,’ Harry continued.

‘And there’s a load of fencing.’ She reached up with her hands. ‘Well high, and cameras watching the gate out front.’

‘How do you know Ben’s there?’

The girl stepped away from the wall and stood with Harry. ‘Me and a certain sergeant’s son have been hacking the defense departments intranet.’ She spoke with a soft but proud tone.

‘Yeah, Sal is best mates with this weedy twat at school who likes to hack his dad’s work computer. She’s printed off a load of Intel about their progress with a person called SB. She’s got names, like the Prince and that Joe Shepherd bloke from the Clan. He was the arse who give me a kicking the night they strapped nuts and bolts to me body to blow up the King.

‘We’ve got him Wolf Girl.’ For a moment his eyes shone. Wynona wanted to hug him. ‘If you still want him. Me, I’m not bothered.’ He looked away, the sparkle gone from his eyes. ‘Sal made me come and tell. So, there it is, like.’

‘Can you take me there?’

‘Sure, if you want.’

The girl punched Harry on the arm. ‘The weedy twat, is called Andrew, and he showed us how to get into the building. It’s all good.’