



Behind Enemy Lines

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To Noah, who will one day hold the world in
his hands. There is a price for greatness,
for standing out from the crowd. It isn't easy,
but in the end it's always worth it.

—J.N.



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Library of Congress Control Number: Available

ISBN 978-0-545-38701-9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 13 14 15 16 17

Cover illustration by Michael Heath
Map by Jim McMahon © Scholastic Inc.
Book design by Keirsten Geise

Back cover photography of characters by Michael Frost © Scholastic Inc.

First edition, December 2013

Printed in China

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Scholastic US: 557 Broadway · New York, NY 10012
Scholastic Canada: 604 King Street West · Toronto, ON M5V 1E1
Scholastic New Zealand Limited: Private Bag 94407 · Greenmount, Manukau 2141
Scholastic UK Ltd.: Euston House · 24 Eversholt Street · London NW1 1DB



EUROPE, 1943





Hit and Run

RIQ WARPED into their new reality with a hard landing on the pavement. Grumbling loudly, he did a quick check to see if anything was broken. For some reason he had a stick in his back pocket, evidence of their recent adventure with Sacagawea. It was split in two, but that wasn't the break that worried him. He was sore where he'd landed on one knee, and knew he'd have a nasty bruise soon. When he'd joined the Hystorians, nobody ever warned him about the more painful parts of the job.

"Are you guys okay?" he asked Dak and Sera. But when he received no answer, he jumped to his feet and looked around. Where were they?

"A little help, please!"

That was Dak's voice, but it took a minute for Riq to find him. When he did, he groaned in disbelief. Dak and Sera had landed above him on the awning of a building. They might as well have landed in a pillow factory. He

reached up to offer them a hand down, but Sera only grabbed the bar of the awning and used it to swing herself to the ground.

“Showing me up now?” Dak asked with a laugh. “Okay, I’ve got this.” He took hold of the same bar but instead of gracefully rolling off the awning, he lurched down like a falling sack of flour and got his belt caught on the pole.

Between bursts of laughter, Riq managed to say, “It’s amazing you survived without me for so many years.”

“Hey, the last time I fell onto an awning, I got down just fine,” Dak said defensively.

Which made Riq wonder exactly when and how something like this had happened to Dak before. It wasn’t during their time travels. But he decided not to ask.

Riq grabbed the kid’s belt, but it also took Sera’s help to yank Dak free. When he fell, he landed on them both and they all crashed to the ground. Riq was pretty sure he bruised his other knee in the fall. That figured, because once again Dak had something soft to land on. Him.

Once they’d gotten back to their feet, the friends brushed themselves off while they looked around the area, a quiet town with small shops and friendly looking stores, all closed for the night.

“It’s late,” Sera said. “I feel like we should be tired, but to us, it’s still just another day in the American frontier.”

Riq sighed. For a long time, he had been disconnected from anything he *should* be feeling. "It's all relative," he said. "The time, the day of the week, seasons. No matter what the clock says, we sleep when we're tired and eat when we're hungry. . . ."

"Well, I'm both." Dak licked his lips to emphasize the hunger. "Let's explore the town and maybe we can find a place to stay and get something to eat. There has to be some cheese here somewhere."

The streets were narrow and wound in seemingly random directions. Riq's eye immediately sought out written words, to get a sense for where they might be. Many of the buildings in this area looked old, but cars lined the roadside and an occasional phone booth or mailbox occupied the sidewalk.

"We're in the twentieth century," Sera said as they started walking. "And somewhere in Europe, I think? I wish the SQuare had told us where and when we were going, and not just the coordinates to enter into the Ring."

Riq pointed to a shop sign on their left. "*McGregor and Sons, Butchers,*" he read. "Written in English."

"We're in Aberdeen, Scotland," Dak said. "April 21, 1943. Smack dab in the middle of World War Two."

Riq hated to admit it, but sometimes Dak was pretty good at figuring things out. He started to say so, then stopped when he looked over.

"What?" Dak had his nose buried in a half-crumpled

newspaper. Even from here, Riq could see its name, *The Aberdeen Press & Journal*. No doubt the date was printed somewhere right below it.

“Yeah, you’re a regular Sherlock Holmes,” Riq said.

“If you mean that I’m good at gathering clues for my brilliant deductions, then I take that as a compliment!”

“Okay, Sherlock, then figure out why we’re here.” Riq looked around. “Who has the SQuare?”

With one hand still on the newspaper, Dak reached into his pants and pulled out the electronic tablet, then held it out for Riq.

“Ew, no!” Riq had never understood why the kid had to carry it in his pants.

“I’ll take it,” Sera said, stretching out her hand. “It’s been acting funny ever since I had to take it apart in Baghdad, so I’ll probably have to tinker with it anyway.”

The three of them huddled beneath a streetlight and Sera powered on the device. The screen was slower to come on than usual, which worried Riq. Even in the twentieth century, technology was still very basic. The best computers of this era filled entire rooms and were only capable of simple math. Where were they supposed to get another SQuare if this one failed?

He knew the answer to that: the future. In fact, the Hystorians had already told them they would have to return to the future for a new SQuare before they could fix the Prime Break that had started it all. But Riq wanted to put off that trip as long as possible. He’d

interacted with his own ancestors several Breaks ago, and he was terrified of facing the consequences of his actions. Especially if the consequences meant that when he returned to the twenty-first century, he would no longer exist.

Sera pounded on one side of the device and words faded onto the screen. One word, actually, and she leaned in to see it better.

"It must be broken," she said. "We only have one piece of the code."

"What's the word?" Riq asked.

She shrugged. "Run."

Riq folded his arms, wondering what sort of clue could be embedded in that word. "Run? Yeah, that could mean anything."

"On this date, in Aberdeen, that means only one thing," Dak said. "RUN!"

He bolted down the street with Riq and Sera on his heels. They hadn't gotten far before Riq detected the faint buzz of engines coming toward them. Airplane engines, and plenty of them.

"Bombers!" Riq cried.

Dak paused long enough to turn around. There was fear in his eyes, and Riq couldn't help but follow his gaze. Silhouetted against the night sky were the forms of several planes, flying low enough that the black Nazi swastika was clearly visible, outlined in white on their tails. A shudder went through him just to look at it.

“It sounds like people screaming,” Sera said, covering her ears to block out the horrible noise.

“Those are sirens on the planes,” Dak said. “It’s psychological warfare, meant to scare people.”

“Because bombings aren’t scary enough?” Sera called back.

“Everyone was scared of the bombings,” Dak called over his shoulder. “The German air force was one of the strongest in the world at this time.”

“Stop yelling history facts and run faster!” Riq said.

Dak’s retort was drowned in another siren, this one coming from nearby. The earsplitting sound pierced the night, warning the sleeping town of the raid.

And then the planes were upon them.

Dak dodged toward a street on his left, but from the corner of his eye, Riq saw a plane drop something in that direction. He grabbed Dak’s sleeve and yanked him the other way. Sera screamed as another bomb landed down the street on their right. Glass shattered nearby, and the entire wall of a building crumbled to the ground.

There might have been people in that building, Riq thought.

“C’mon!” Sera made a run for a church straight ahead of them.

“No!” Dak shouted. “No, I’ve seen pictures of that exact church . . . afterward.”

Other people were swarming into the streets by then. Half-dressed men and women carried children in their

arms or hurried them hand in hand down the streets. The children wailed as explosions echoed throughout the town in a deadly fireworks show. Riq, Dak, and Sera found themselves overtaken and forced to move in the direction of the crowd. But Riq had no idea where the crowd was headed and didn't like the feeling of being wedged against so many panicked bodies. When he saw a way out, he grabbed Dak and Sera and pulled them into a side street.

They ran straight into a squadron of soldiers rushing to help what people they could. Riq and Dak backed against the wall in time, but Sera was slower and was knocked to the ground. One of the soldiers stopped, a lanky young man with an easy smile and red hair shaved close to his head. He reached out a hand to help Sera to her feet.

"Ye're not from Aberdeen." His eyes scanned their clothes and then flicked to the Square in Sera's hands. "Where's ye fowk?"

"Our families?" Riq responded. While Sera brushed herself off, he said to the soldier, "We're on our own, very far from home, and we need shelter."

"My name is Cadet Duncan Shaw," the soldier said. "I'll help you lot, but keep edgy for the bombs."

Duncan steered them down an alley. Riq looked up at the high stone walls and thought if a bomb landed up there, it'd bring the surrounding buildings down on their heads before they had a chance to escape.

"Where are you taking us?" he asked.

"Bomb shelter." He hurried them forward until they came to a small metal structure with a rounded roof, half buried in the ground. "On yer knees now."

He practically pushed Sera to the ground. Dak and Riq crawled into the shelter right after her. Something exploded behind them, and they crawled faster. Duncan followed them, and only seconds later the sound of granite walls and other debris falling into the alleyway blew into their shelter, along with dust and small bits of rock.

"It's a gubbing from the Nazis tonight!" Duncan said.

"Gubbing?" Dak mouthed to Riq.

Riq sighed. "A beating."

"My translator isn't picking up on some of the words," Sera whispered to Riq. "Maybe it's broken, too."

"It's working fine," Riq said under his breath. "It just considers this English."

They sat there a moment in silence, in a space barely big enough for six or seven people. Riq wondered if anyone else would follow them into the shelter, but no one did. Then Dak started to squirm. By now, Riq recognized why. Dak was thinking about some history factoid that just had to be shared, whether anyone wanted to hear it or not.

"Spit it out," Riq said. "You look like you'll hurt yourself if you don't."

Dak grinned. "The German planes are impressive and all, but the really interesting ones were the British

Spitfires. Did you know they were painted pink? That allowed them to fly almost invisibly below the clouds at sunset. Imagine that – pink warplanes!”

“The only warplanes that interest me right now are the ones over my head,” Sera said. “Why couldn’t we warp into someplace quiet for once?”

Duncan sighed and leaned forward with his hands at rest on his knees. “Aye, it’s as I thought. I ken what ye need. Sit down, lads, and let’s have a blether.”

“A long talk?” Riq rephrased it for Sera’s benefit only. Dak could figure it out on his own. “Talk about what?”

“Ye’re a very long way from home, eh? Measured in years, not miles.”

“How did you know—” Sera started to ask.

But Duncan only smiled. “I recognized ye at once. I’m yer Hystorian.”