

Chapter 1: A Bad Dream

I'm Michael Vey. Last night I had a really weird dream. I was back home in Idaho, sitting at the table with the cool kids in the cafeteria at Meridian High School. (For the record, I'm not one of the cool kids.) My girlfriend, Taylor (who is one of the cool kids), was sitting on my right side in her cheerleading outfit. My best friend, Ostin, was on my left, eating cheese pizza and garlic bread. The rest of the table was filled with a bunch of cheerleaders and basketball players. As usual, Ostin and I looked as out of place as chocolate doughnuts at a Weight Watchers meeting.

The school's basketball team was joking with me like they did at Maddie's party, calling me "Li'l Norris"—short for little Chuck Norris—and trying to outdo one another with their Li'l Norris jokes.

Drew, the basketball team's star point guard, said, "Li'l Norris is so tough, dark is afraid of him."

"Yeah?" said Spencer. "Li'l Norris is so tough that the road in front of Meridian High used to be called Li'l Norris Street, but it was changed because no one crosses Li'l Norris and lives."

Everyone laughed except Ostin, who looked confused. "I don't think it was ever really called Li'l Norris Street," he said.

"Shhh," I said. "It's a joke."

"Yeah?" said Drew. "Monsters check under their beds to make sure Li'l Norris isn't there."

"I got it; I got it," Spencer said. "Li'l Norris is so tough that he died ten years ago but Death is too afraid to tell him."

Everyone was laughing when a low, angry voice behind me said, "If Li'l Norris is so tough, why is he hiding in the jungle?"

I turned around to see Dr. Hatch standing behind me. I was paralyzed with fear. Suddenly everyone else vanished and it was just the two of us. Hatch leaned forward, close enough that I could feel his breath and see his eyes through the dark lenses of his sunglasses.

"I'm going to find you, Vey," he whispered. "And when I do, I'm going to hurt you."

That's when I woke up in the jungle.