

Chapter 1: The Second Act

My life is snoring.

Everything's boring.

Tuesday, April 16 (My Birthday)

My name is Michael Vey. It's been a few years since I've written anything about my life. Really, there hasn't been a whole lot to write about. At least not anything you'd want to read. That's because the last three years have been what most people consider normal—and by “normal,” I mean not being tied up and fed to rats or being hunted by a homicidal maniac who bought a cannibal fork so he could celebrate his victory over us by eating me.

I'm in my second semester of my junior year of college, working toward a business management degree. Even that sounds boring. I scribbled that rhyme—technically a couplet—as I counted down the minutes until class was over. Other than our upcoming Electroclan reunion, there's nothing in my life that vaguely excites me right now.

The thing is, in a life like mine, normal doesn't feel *normal*. I hear these college students around me talk about what they want to do with their lives. I've already faced death, brought down a dictator, captured billions of dollars, and saved the world from Elgen tyranny. What am I supposed to do for a second act? I mean, what other college student has the Tuvaluan medal of honor and is also on the Peruvian government's Most-Wanted Terrorists list? (I'm still on it. You can see it online.) The thing is, easy living makes for boring reading. Who wants to read about someone's normal day?

Since I last wrote, I graduated from high school, started college at Boise State, and went fishing with my dad in Alaska. Actually, the fishing thing had its moment. My dad and I were fishing for salmon at Mendenhall Lake in Juneau. After an hour we still hadn't caught anything when I had an idea. I put my hand into the water and pulsed. You should have seen the fish jump out of the water. Six of them jumped into the boat. It was crazy. A thirty-inch king salmon smacked me in the face. Another landed in my dad's lap. My dad hinted that it took the fun out of fishing, but really, how much fun is fishing anyway? Sitting around in a boat holding a stick? Besides, I don't think catching

fish was really what was on his mind. I think he just wanted to spend time with me. After him being gone for eight years, we had a lot to catch up on.

Which leads me to another thought. The last time I wrote, I had just found out that my father was alive, something I learned just as General-Admiral-President-Doctor Hatch—whatever he was calling himself back then—was about to kill him. I'm grateful he's back, but it's changed things. To be honest, reconnecting with my father was harder than I thought it would be. A lot harder. First, deep inside, I think I still have some resentment for what his "death" put my mother and me through. I'm not saying he didn't do the right thing in faking his death. We were all in real danger, and faking his death was probably the only way my father could have kept us all from really dying.

Second, for all those years, my mother and I were all we had, so there's a special bond there. It's not like I have an Oedipus complex or anything. I just still feel intensely protective of her. That's why I risked my life rescuing her from the Elgen. People say things like "I'd take a bullet for you," but I really did. That's something few people will ever experience. I feel guilty saying this, but, in all honesty, it felt a little like my father was crashing the party. But I'm working through this. At least I'm trying. Maybe I need a therapist.

Having a father around isn't the only major change I'm dealing with. We now live in a mansion in the same neighborhood where I went to my first real party—the one where I knocked Corky over. It still doesn't feel real. Maybe it's imposter syndrome.

I think my dad bought the mansion because he was trying to make up for all my mother and I had gone without, but my mom really didn't want a house that big. "It's just more to clean," she says. So, we got house cleaners. But I think there's more to it. We had lived in little apartments for so long, it's what we were used to. In our apartment I couldn't sneeze without my mother asking me if I was coming down with something. Now I could scream in my room and no one would hear me. Like in outer space.

Taylor and I are still together—at least emotionally. I'm here in Boise, and she's studying psychology at ASU in Phoenix, Arizona.

Taylor and her twin sister, Tara, are roommates. I don't know what Tara's majoring in. Maybe psychology as well, but more likely partying. I love Tara, but talk about head games. One time, she

made everyone think she was Ostin. I suspected something, so I said, “Ostin, explain again the Dyson sphere.” Tara just looked at me, then said, “I’m not feeling like it,” which, frankly, was more revealing than her not knowing what a Dyson sphere was. The one thing Ostin is never *not* in the mood for—besides eating—is explaining something.

Case in point. I once asked him a complex geometry question. I was doing homework late at night, and he was watching TV. He answered the question correctly. When I said thank you, he didn’t answer. When I checked on him, he was asleep.

I’m not really sure where Jack and Abi are. At least relationally. Physically, Jack went to Italy for a year to train with Veytric Security and then was re-stationed in Brazil. It’s his job to watch over all the South American Starxource plants. The Peruvian Starxource plant in the jungle we destroyed was never rebuilt. A new one was constructed closer to Lima, which made more sense.

The first time Jack went back to Peru, he called me and we reminisced about the old days, like when Zeus saved us all by setting off the sprinkler system, killing the rats and almost himself in the process. Jack said it was a head trip going back, like a soldier returning to an old war zone. He even went back to the spot where Wade was killed. I don’t think Jack will ever get over that. None of us will, but no one was as affected as Jack.

Jack wanted Abi to go with him to Italy, then South America, but she didn’t. She had her own dreams. I think that’s what started the rift between them. I don’t blame Abi for not going. She wanted to go into the field of medicine. She started in nursing. She’s exactly the kind of nurse I’d want—especially since she can take away pain without drugs. Then she decided to get her doctorate as a nurse anesthetist at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. That way she can take away pain without always suffering herself.

Then, there’s Ostin. Ostin’s studying at Caltech. If you don’t know where Caltech is, don’t worry, you’re not going there. It’s one of those schools where you have to have a 4.17 grade point average to get in. I didn’t even know that grade point averages went that high. That means if you have a straight-A GPA, you’re way below average.

Of course, Ostin is anything but average. His SAT was 1600, which is perfect. To put that into perspective, more than two million students take the test each year. Less than five hundred people

get a perfect score. That's like half of a percent of a percent of a percent. Ostin didn't just get a perfect score—he finished the test in less than an hour. The SAT is supposed to take three hours and fifteen minutes with breaks. He answered the last question at forty-seven minutes, twelve seconds. He timed it. Of course he did.

I don't know why I thought everything would be easy after defeating the Elgen—as if I thought the world was peaceful except for them. It's not. It never has been. There will always be monsters and bullies. Big countries bully little countries. Countries bully citizens. Citizens bully each other. Maybe if people were more kind, countries would be too.

After all we experienced, it's no surprise that I have some PTSD. I've heard it said that soldiers can leave the war but the war doesn't always leave them. I get it. Sometimes I wake in the night screaming.

A few years ago, I woke screaming, and my mother came in to check on me. I was still asleep and I thought she was an Elgen guard. I shocked her so badly, she lost consciousness. It could have been much worse. I could have electrocuted her. I lock my door now.

Like I said, things have been pretty predictable and dull, and the only thing I was really looking forward to was our upcoming Electroclan reunion. And that's when my story got interesting again.

I was hoping for something exciting to come along. I guess I should be more careful of what I wish for.