

# CHAPTER ONE

IT STARTED OFF as a normal Saturday morning. I woke up later than usual, seeing as I didn't have school today, nor did I even have work, since today was my day off. Without looking out the window—a mistake I was going to regret soon enough—I hopped out of bed, took a shower, and, again without looking out the window, made my way down the stairs to the kitchen, following the waft of freshly-cooked bacon, eggs, and waffles.

Mom was standing in front of the stovetop, her favorite 'I HEART SUPERHEROES' apron tied around her waist, a large and growing plate of waffles growing next to her as she made more. Dad, meanwhile, was sitting at the dining room table, was sipping his coffee and looking at the news on the tablet that James and I had gotten for his birthday last month.

Speaking of James, my older brother sat at the table as well. Like me, he must have gotten up early, because his long hair was already styled the way he liked it and he wore his usual black leather jacket. He seemed to be texting someone, who I guessed had to be his girlfriend from college, Holly, who I still hadn't met. James had come down to stay here for the weekend, which was pretty typical for James. Although he went to college on the other side of the state, James visited home frequently. He *claimed* he didn't have homesickness, but I knew him well enough to know he was lying.

Regardless, none of us looked out the window. Even Mom, despite standing right next to the kitchen sink, didn't look out the window over the kitchen sink. I wasn't the only one who was going to be regretting that later, though perhaps it wouldn't have made a difference either way.

"Good morning, Alex!" said Mom, looking over her shoulder at me and smiling. "You're up bright and early. Going to work today?"

I shook my head as I took my usual seat at the table and began piling bacon and eggs onto my plate. "Nah, Mom. Today is my day off. Kind of need it after how hard I've been working this last month."

"You certainly have been working harder than usual," said Dad, lowering his tablet to look at me. He was wearing a faded black T-shirt with his favorite band, the Screaming Hyenas, on it. Guess today was his day off, too. "You and Rubberman. Seems like you're working overtime all the time now. The news says there's been a spike in crime all over the city since the police force got destroyed."

I grimaced. "I believe it. It's gotten crazy out there. Just yesterday, Rubberman and I busted three car snatchers and stopped an attempted rape. It's nuts."

James shook his head without looking up from his phone. "Golden City's really gone downhill since I stopped working as a sidekick. Maybe I need to get back into the biz to show you and your boss how it's *really* done."

I sighed. James had once been the sidekick of the superhero Windchime, using the alias Lightning Fist to fight crime alongside him. James hadn't actually enjoyed his sidekick work, though, and quit after a while. I knew he still had the Lightning Fist costume somewhere in the house, but without his sidekick license, James wouldn't actu-

ally be able to practice crime-fighting legally. “It’s not that easy, James, and you know it.”

James chuckled and punched me in the shoulder. “Just joking around, Alex. I know you and your boss are doing your best to keep up with it. Worry about you every day, little bro.”

I nodded. “Thanks. Yeah, sorry. Just been under a lot of stress recently.”

That was putting it mildly. After the Zero Knight known as Slasher had destroyed the Golden City Police Department, crime had spiked all over the city, even though the Three Fingers Gang, the primary criminal gang in Golden City, had also been destroyed by Slasher. Actually, I thought that the reason crime had spiked was because the Three Fingers Gang’s destruction had left a void that a whole bunch of criminals were trying to fill. As a result, Rubberman and I had been working overtime to keep the streets safe, which meant spending more time pounding the pavement dealing with random crooks and criminals than we usually did. That was part of our contract with the city, but we were doing it a lot more than usual.

The GCPD wasn’t entirely destroyed, however. Chief Williams, the chief of the police department, had survived the slaughter. As well, state troopers had been sent in by the state government to make up for the lack of police support, though the troopers were few and far between and they didn’t seem to like me and Rubberman for some reason. I was also aware that the GCPD was still in the process of hiring and training new recruits, but the recruits were still so new that they were almost more of a liability than an asset when dealing with criminals.

All in all, Rubberman and I had certainly been more like Masks than Capes this past month. Granted, working more hours meant I was getting more pay, but it was still exhausting, especially because I still had to balance it out with my schoolwork.

“No kidding,” said Dad with another sip of his coffee. “You and your boss had to fight that Zero Knight guy last month. I’m not much of a supervillain expert, but if what I read is true, that’s a big deal all by itself.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” I said as I shoveled a forkful of eggs into my mouth. “Slasher was crazy.”

“At least you only had to deal with just the one guy, right?” said James, glancing up from his phone at me. “Haven’t heard any news about the Zero Knights in Golden City recently. Have you?”

I shook my head but didn’t smile. It was true that we hadn’t heard one peep from the Order of the Zero Knights—one of the most powerful criminal/supervillain organizations on the planet—since the death of Slasher last month. That despite Slasher’s final warning of a ‘storm’ coming to Golden City that would raze the city itself to the ground. I knew I should have been relieved that the Zero Knights hadn’t tried to avenge Slasher’s death yet, but at the same time, a part of me was worried that the Zero Knights might attack when we least expected it. If they attacked now, when Rubberman and I were already stretched thin trying to keep the peace, I wasn’t sure we would be able to defeat them.

If I had thought to look out the window, even just once, I could have acted quicker.

Instead, I just shoved another forkful of eggs into my mouth and said, “Nothing. Haven’t heard from them since Slasher’s death.”

“Bet you scared ‘em good, little bro,” said James with a wink. “No Zero Knight has ever been killed before. I bet they know better than to try to attack you and your boss now.”

I nodded, despite not really believing that. The official story was that Rubberman and I killed Slasher, but the truth was that it had been Johnny ‘Three Fingers’ Diamond who had dealt the finishing blow, avenging his fellow gangsters who had been slaughtered at Slasher’s hands. Three Fingers had even insisted on us taking the credit for the kill, which I originally thought was because he wanted us to take the glory, but if I had looked out the window—again, even just once—I would have realized he probably did it to paint a huge target on our backs for the Zero Knights to aim at.

“Probably,” I said as I took a gulp of orange juice, enjoying the sweet, tangy taste. “Not that life has really been any easier since Slasher’s death, though.”

“True enough, but I’d think nabbing purse-snatchers would be a lot easier than fighting a Zero Knight,” said James. “At least, that’s my opinion, anyway.”

James suddenly put his phone back into his pocket and stood up. “Well, looks like I got to go now. Told Mark I was going to meet up with him at the gym to work out after breakfast and you know how Mark gets about me being late.”

I nodded. Mark was one of James’ old high school friends. They had both gone off to different colleges after graduating, but had both planned to meet back up in Golden City to hang out like the good old days this weekend. I didn’t mind it so much. I was going to spend today at Frank’s house anyway, so it wasn’t like I had expected to spend much time with James while he was here anyway.

“All right, but be careful out there,” said Mom, glancing over her shoulder at James as he picked up his backpack from the floor and slung it over his right shoulder. “Lots of criminals on the streets now.”

“Don’t worry about me, Mom,” said James with a thumbs up. He patted me on the head. “Worry about Alex here. He’s the one who’s going to be actually fighting those criminals.”

“Not today,” I said, shaking my head. “Today’s my day off.”

“Right, little bro, but you know what I mean,” said James. “Anyway, adios, everybody!”

With that, James walked out of the kitchen and toward the front door. I heard James open the front door, but I didn’t hear the front door close. Instead, I heard James shout, “Uh, guys? The sky isn’t *supposed* to be green today, right?”

Puzzled, I stood up from the table and made my way over to the front door, with both Mom and Dad following along behind me. Here we found James standing in the front door, staring up at the sky outside, but it was hard to see what he was looking at until he stepped out onto the front porch, allowing us to step out with him.

At first, I didn’t know what James was talking about. The morning sky looked as blue and bright as it always did, with a few clouds in the air. The crisp morning air was both chilly and yet relaxing after being inside our warm house. My hair, still slightly damp from my shower, felt colder than usual in a soft February breeze that came through just then. A stray black cat sat near James’ red truck, but quickly ran away as soon as I looked at it.

“James, what are you talking about?” I said, looking at him. “The sky looks normal to me. It definitely doesn’t look green.”

James bit his lower lip. “But it *was* green. At least, it was green a few minutes ago. I saw it with my own two eyes.”

I smiled. “Do you need to borrow my glasses, James? Because I think you might need them if you’re going to start seeing things like—”

The sky suddenly flickered green, causing me to look up at it myself. But when I looked at the sky again, it was back to its normal blue color, with nary a sign of an unnatural green color anywhere.

“Did you see that?” said James, pointing at the sky again. “It was green. I saw it this time. I know I did.”

I took off my glasses and wiped them off before putting them on again and looking at the sky. “Okay, I know I saw *something*, but maybe it’s some kind of hallucination?”

“What are you two talking about?” said Dad, holding his coffee cup, which was steaming slightly in the cold morning air. “I didn’t see anything. If this is some kind of prank —”

“It’s not,” James insisted. “It’s totally not. I *saw* the sky turn green. Alex did, too.”

I opened my mouth to agree when, without warning, the sky flickered green again. Only this time, it *stayed* green. The rays of the sun turned green as well as they passed through the greenness above, coating our entire lawn, house, and whole neighborhood in a light shade of green.

“What the hell?” said Dad with a start, spilling a little bit of coffee from his mug onto the welcome mat. “Why did the sky turn green?”

“That’s the question *I* was asking,” said James indignantly. “What do you think, Alex?”

“I—” I was interrupted when my phone beeped. I pulled out my phone and saw that it was a test from Rubberman, which read thus:

*Alex, turn on the news. Now. And when you’re done with that, get to the Elastic Cave immediately.*

“Alex, who texted you?” said Mom, her face pale with fear. “Rubberman?”

I nodded. I glanced at the green sky again, which I noticed actually appeared to be some sort of green dome, and said, “Yeah. He says we need to check out the news. Now.”

Dad held up his tablet. “I’ve got my tablet. Let’s see what the Golden City Journal’s app says.”

Dad opened the Golden City Journal’s news app on his tablet as we crowded around him to see what was going on. A pretty blonde news anchor named Stephanie Red appeared on the screen as the headline ‘BREAKING: GREEN DOME APPEARS OVER GOLDEN CITY’ appeared in a box next to her face.

“Good morning, Golden City!” said Stephanie in a serious voice. “This morning, what appears to be a strange, green energy barrier has appeared in the sky overhead. The origin and nature of the barrier are not known at this time, but early reports suggest that the barrier reaches the city limits at least. This is still a developing story, so stayed tuned to the Golden City Journal to be the first to—”

Stephanie's image froze for a moment and was then immediately replaced by an image of a man I had never seen before but who looked familiar for some reason.

He wore what looked like a full suit of powered armor, which covered his entire body from head to toe. At least, I assumed it was powered armor because its reflective surface made it look like he was wearing armor made out of mirrors. A 'o' was cut into his chest. His face was hidden behind what looked like a miniature mirror attached to his helmet, while two large, mirror-like shields were attached to both of his arms. He stood in what looked like a dark void, with the only light focused strictly on him, making his reflective armor hard to look at directly.

"Citizens of Golden City," the armored figure began, a light Mexican accent coloring his words. "You might have awoken this morning to see that the sky over your tiny and frankly irrelevant city has turned green. For those of you closer to the city limits, you may have found a green energy barrier blocking off the roads, making it impossible for you to enter the city for your daily commute. Both the green sky and barrier are part of the same green energy dome that has covered the entirety of Golden City itself."

My eyes widened in shock. My Mom and Dad gasped, while James muttered under his breath, "Seriously?"

"You might be wondering why this is," said the armored figure. "Or how this happened. I won't answer the second question, but I can and will answer the first.

"My name is Mirar. I am a member of the Order of the Zero Knights. And in less than twenty-four hours, your entire city—from the tallest skyscraper to the smallest doghouse—will be razed to the ground and every last one of you will die."

-

Read the rest of *First Storm* [HERE!](#)