

opening this can of worms

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/42097032) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/42097032>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Hermitcraft SMP
Relationship:	No Romantic Relationship(s) , Evil Xisuma & Worm Man (Hermitcraft) , Worm Man & ZedaphPlays (Hermitcraft)
Character:	Worm Man (Hermitcraft) , Evil Xisuma (Hermitcraft) , ZedaphPlays (Hermitcraft) , Xisumavoid (Hermitcraft)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Superheroes/Superpowers , Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Swearing , Blood and Violence , Characters have different names , Worm Man centric , Worm Man and Zedaph are Separate , Humor
Language:	English
Series:	Part 5 of the hermitcraft hero au (VDHAU)
Stats:	Published: 2022-10-03 Completed: 2023-03-13 Words: 9,192 Chapters: 4/4

opening this can of worms

by [kiwinatorwaffles](#)

Summary

"What's your name?" XVoid asks.

"N—" Norman freezes. He can't just compromise his identity like that; he'll need to think of some alias. "Worm... man," he decides on a whim. Oh *goodness*, he's already regretting it—what kind of a stupid name is that?

But instead of laughing, XVoid nods. Even though his face is hidden under the helmet, Norman can tell the superhero is smiling. "Well, Worm-Man, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Or, in which a shy teenager unexpectedly discovers his powers, and his eyes open to a completely new world of superheroes.

Notes

i was looking through my list of potential vdhaU oneshot ideas, and i realized that three ideas were about norman. so i thought hey, why not make a short, three-chapter fic centered around him? that turned into 4 chapters of course but. you know. so now ill be updating this fic alongside of the knights spinoff!

just a preface though, the events of this fic will be best understood after reading my

previous work [it takes two the play \(the game of mutual secrecy\)](#). it's not required of course, but there will be many cross-references between the two works. but in case you don't feel like reading it, here are the civilian names you should know for the first chapter:

worm man: norman plays

evil xisuma: evan voros

with that being said, please do enjoy! i've always wanted to explore norman more through writing anyway, and this will be a perfect prequel to the next fic i have planned :]

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

boys will be bugs

Chapter Summary

what happens when you pair an anxiety-ridden tall boy with a chaotic rascal child?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Norman's lunch has disappeared.

His ham and cheese sandwich (without the crust, just how he likes it), which he had left sitting right on the table, is now gone after he left to get milk from the lunch line.

Well, this isn't ideal, Norman thinks, setting his milk down next to the empty space on the table. "Lunch getting stolen" isn't something he had on his list for his first day in seventh grade at a new school, but it is what it is. Bummer.

He is quite hungry today, but he also doesn't want to touch whatever the heck the school is serving today—he can already tell he won't be able to stand the texture or smell of the "macaroni with meatballs" (which, by the way, is literally made of *spaghetti* noodles, so he doesn't know why it's called that). His only other option on the menu would be the peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but he's allergic to peanuts. And, of course, this is the *one* day he neglected to bring an epipen. *Darn!*

Sitting down and crossing his legs, Norman stares at his empty lunch bag, trying to think of how to solve this predicament. Maybe he can report to a teacher and ask to catch the thief—no, that's ridiculous. What can a teacher even do, anyway? Let him have free lunch as compensation? That won't solve the problem—it's not money he is concerned about; the school lunch is simply too awful to stomach, as most public school lunches are. Going off campus is out of the question as well; there are no places around that makes food fast enough.

And maybe the thief was also hungry and had no lunch. He can totally understand stealing lunch if he's hungry too—not that *he* will ever do it, but in a hypothetical world, perhaps he might consider it. Nobody is quite reasonable when they are very hungry. But there is a possibility that whoever stole his lunch is just being a big jerk, but Norman prefers to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Sighing, Norman stuffs his lunch bag back into his backpack. Maybe he'll just drink the milk for today; it's better than nothing after all.

As he opens the carton and begins to take a sip, Norman suddenly hears, "Hey! Uh, it seems you're missing a lunch!" Surprised, he sets down the milk and turns to the direction of the voice, where he spots a short kid with scraggly brown hair and fluffy bangs covering the left eye.

"Yeah, uh, I sure am!" Norman says, immediately beginning to feel the sweat form on his palms. *Oh goodness, social interaction in the wild... Quick, think of a way to not make the conversation awkward?* He shrugs. "I think someone... stole it?"

Once his words leave his mouth, Norman kicks himself in the leg. What kind of a stupid comment was that? What if this random kid thinks that he's, what—complaining? *Traumadumping?* About

his lunch being ruined by a thief? It's not like they've met before... Is this something one would tell a stranger? Norman's mind screeches in despair, but he simply shoots the other kid an awkward smile.

"Wow, uh! That sure sucks!" the kid replies with an equally awkward laugh. "Whoever stole it must have been thinking they were real funny, huh?" The kid quickly takes a seat on the empty chair next to Norman and pulls out two halves of a sandwich. "Well, I'm offering my lunch! I'm not uh, very hungry anyway, so you can have half of it."

"What's in it?" Norman asks, curious, and then kicks himself again. He should have just refused! Now this kid is going to think he's interested, and he's going to *have* to take the offer!

The kid squints at the sandwich. "Ham, lettuce, tomato, and some crushed potato chips? I think? I dunno what the hell my brother puts in these things, but they always taste good, so—" The kid holds out one of the halves. "Do you want it?"

Norman's mind does the mental gymnastics of trying to figure out what would be the most polite. Zaeden had always told him to never accept food from strangers (having heard lots of Zae's horror stories, he can completely understand) but if he refuses, he might end up upsetting the kind stranger. Besides, he *is* very hungry, so...

Glancing back and forth at his milk and the sandwich, Norman sighs and reaches for the offer. "Thanks—you really saved me there. I think I'd puke if I ate the school lunch!"

"Bro, same!" the kid laughs. "That shit looks *disgusting*. I wouldn't touch those 'meat'balls with a ten-foot pole!"

And somehow, through this interaction, Norman makes a new friend. While chatting, the kid introduces himself by full name, Evander Xavier Voros, Evan for short ("I chose it myself," Evan said), and that he is also in seventh grade.

"I haven't seen you around before," Evan mentions, mouth full of lettuce. "But then again, this school is pretty big, so there's a lot of people I don't know."

"Oh, I just moved here this summer!" Norman says. "We came from Britain, because my parents have work stuff to take care of here—wow, this sandwich is *really* good!"

"I know, right? My brother's sandwiches are the best!" Evan huffs proudly. "And, my parents were also from Britain! My brother's got the accent too, so I picked up some phrases from him."

"Huh, we live in a small world!"

While chatting, Norman finds out a lot about Evan just from his outward personality. One thing Norman notices is that Evan is *incredibly* loud, to the point where his voice cuts through the rest of the conversations, contrasted with himself, who prefers not to speak unless approached first. That can probably be a good thing, especially since he needs to open up a bit more eventually, right? Maybe Evan can teach him some secrets.

But alas, lunchtime comes to an end once the bell rings. The two promptly pack up and throw away their garbage, then head to the halls for class.

"Where are you going?" Evan asks.

"Oh, just gonna get my textbooks for science."

“Pshh, you actually take that thing to school?”

“... You don’t?”

“Nah. Most of the time, the teacher isn’t gonna do shit with the textbook until the second week.”

“Well, I’m gonna get it anyway just in case,” Norman remarks. Evan is probably right, but he doesn’t want to risk it anyway.

“Fair. See you around!” Evan waves enthusiastically, disappearing into the crowded halls.

Laughing with amusement, Norman grabs the textbook from his locker and also makes his way to his next class.

Evan is pretty cool, he thinks, smiling. I hope I’ll have some more classes with him.

That hope doesn’t have to wait long to be fulfilled—right when he steps into the science classroom, the first person he sees at the lab tables is none other than his good friend Evan Voros.

“No fucking way!” Evan exclaims. He excitedly points to the other seat at the table. “Norman! Come sit with me!”

“It looks like we’ve got the same teacher!” Norman says, skipping forward. “How lucky!”

As Norman takes a seat, however, he spots the edge of a ziplock peeking out from Evan’s bag—the exact one that he used to hold *his* ham and cheese sandwich... Could Evan be...?

Norman looks up to Evan with shock, but upon seeing Evan’s excited face, he decides that it’s not worth it to get angry. If Evan *was* the thief, he had offered his own lunch (and to be honest, it probably tasted better than Norman’s sandwich anyway), and that’s more than enough for an apology. He forgives Evan.

In a way, Norman finds himself quite lucky to have made a friend on his first day in a new school. Overall, Evan is a really funny guy, and Norman cannot *wait* to spend more school days hanging out with him.

I’ll definitely tell Zaeden about this tonight!

Chapter End Notes

very short first chapter! for those wondering about when evan references stealing norman's lunch in TGMS, here it is ;D

next up: norman discovers his powers.

butterflies in your stomach may bloom into something unexpected

Chapter Summary

when your autism is so strong it gives you superpowers

Chapter Notes

warning for a mild depiction of a panic attack/sensory overload! i didn't want to make it too detailed, but i figured i'd warn for it anyway

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“A *Halloween party*?”

“Yeah! A costume party, too!”

Norman stares at the flyer Evan holds in his hands, scanning the text up and down. Apparently, some rich kid in the school had their parents rent out a party hall for Halloween and invite basically everyone in the school. Not him though, hopefully. He’s not planning on going.

“And... Why are you showing this to me?” Norman asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Why else?” Evan says, hopping around energetically. “I wanna go!”

“Okay. Have fun, then.”

“No, no, Normie! You gotta come with!”

Well, Evan has said the words Norman wants to hear least. He really has no interest in going to a party, so he just makes up an excuse. “I can’t. I’ve already got plans.”

“Like what?”

“Uh... watching scary movies with Zaeden?”

With a cackle so loud it can be heard by the entire school, Evan slaps Norman on the back playfully. “You can do that anytime! Come on, man! I need someone to go with me!”

“Can’t you get anyone else?” Norman asks, becoming more and more desperate for a way to escape the invite.

“I hate to say it, but you’re the only one who can tolerate me!”

“That status will probably change soon!”

“Come on Norman, pleaaaase?” Evan begs, clasping his hands together and giving his best puppy-eyes. “Just this once? We don’t even need to stay the whole time! Just so I can steal the free food!”

Staring at Evan's pleading face, Norman battles against his mind screaming at him to not agree. As much as he despises social events, Evan *is* his friend... so maybe, just for this time.

"Fine," Norman relents with a sigh. "But *only* this time."

"Yaaaaay!" Evan exclaims, pulling Norman into a hug. "Thanks!"

"Of course," Norman says, awkwardly patting Evan's back. "Uh, what are we going to wear?"

Evan releases Norman from the hug, now stroking his chin contemplatively. After a few seconds, his face lights up, and he pulls out his phone. "Okay, so... you know some of those matching costumes?"

"Go on..."

Triumphantly, Evan holds out his phone in front of Norman's face. "*Look*. Matching peanut butter and jelly costumes. It's literally perfect!"

"Oh my gosh, Evan, *no!*"

They end up choosing the costume anyway. On the night of the party, Norman exits the house early, unable to stand Zaeden poking fun at his peanut getup for any longer. The walk to the party hall isn't very far, just a couple of blocks down, but Norman speedwalks the whole way there anyway, not quite fond of the chilly night winds blowing against his face.

Arriving at his destination, Norman steps in front of the path leading to the hall's double doors. The entrance is wide open with trails of costumed people trickling in, proudly displaying its crowds of middle schoolers doing whatever young teens do at a costume party. He isn't particularly thrilled about the thought of going in, but Evan said he'd be waiting wherever the food is, so...

Reluctantly, Norman takes a deep breath and steps through the door. He quickly walks through the party hall, scanning around for any sign of a jelly costume, growing increasingly worried after he makes three loops around the room and *still* can't find Evan! The party opened its halls ten minutes ago. There's no way he isn't in here already unless he's late—

Norman comes to a dead stop, realizing it is most likely that Evan is in fact late. Of course. He's *always* late! Why would it have been any different this time?! He exhales slowly, closing his eyes. Okay. It's not all *too* bad. If Evan isn't here yet, that just means he can probably go back to the entrance and wait there. It'll probably cause less confusion, too.

Just as Norman begins to stride towards the exit, however, an entire conga-line of teenagers march in front of him, blocking him from progressing. Unable to pass through the Great Wall Of Children, Norman whirls around and heads another way, but he only gets so far before hitting a giant crowd again. With every direction he turns to, there are only more and more people squeezing in, completely closing him in a tight box, like a ring of salt around a snail.

To make matters even worse, somewhere in the scramble, a stray arm knocks Norman's glasses off his face. With a yelp, Norman tries to grab his falling glasses, but it is already too late: they have been lost to the sea of shoes and costumes. Being completely blind without his glasses, Norman instantly notices that the path to the exit has suddenly vanished in the mass of blurry shapes.

No! How can he have allowed himself to be this careless?! How will he ever get out now?

Suddenly, the chattering and music around him seem to have become *tremendously* loud, to the

point where all the sounds pile on top of each other like the world's largest, most stressful layer-cake. With this, the panic finally slams into Norman's chest at full force, pushing him to ball up on the ground.

Attempting to at least block out some of the noise, Norman covers his ears with his hands and squeezes his eyes shut. Yet, no matter his blockades, everybody's voices meld into one massive, jeering cackle, which is only exacerbated by the ground-shaking beats of electronic music from the speakers. There is no escape from the chaos of the party.

Taking deep breaths (or at least, trying to) so as to not start crying in the middle of the room, Norman grits his teeth and prays with every fiber of his being for something to get him out of this situation. If there is any higher being up there, it will be *just great* if they shut down the power in the neighborhood, cause a sudden rainstorm, or even send a random ocean wave over to sweep everyone away! He'll take anything at this point!

While Norman distracts himself with more thoughts of how some natural force can yank him out of his misery, he barely notices himself sinking into the ground and that the noises around him have now become muffled.

Huh, Norman thinks, once he finally realizes. *It sounds like I'm underwater. Maybe there really was a flood...*

Slowly but surely, Norman's breathing slows and he loosens the hold on his ears. If he really is underwater, he's not going to question how he's still breathing. Maybe he'll just stay like this a bit longer, and *then* figure out how to not accidentally drown, or something. It's just... nice, being isolated for once. If only the rest of life could be like this forever...

...Until he hears a loud "*NORMIE!*" pierce through his noise-cancelling shield.

Evan!

Eyes shooting open, Norman turns towards the voice, only to find himself *actually* in some sort of a water-like space—only he can see everybody's feet above him? Norman kicks his feet to propel himself up, just like he would when swimming. He reaches for above, curious as to what is happening, but the moment his hand makes contact with the translucent ceiling, it simply breaks out from the surface.

After his hand is out, the rest of his body follows, launching out from his strange water-space and back to his familiar world. Shocked, Norman turns to look at the ground he emerged from, but he finds that it has reverted back to the normal wooden floorboards.

What in the world? Did I just dream all of that?

Before Norman can properly process what just happened, however, he hears a squeal of surprise from a group beside him.

"Holy crap, how'd you suddenly appear there?" one of the guys asks, scrambling up to him. "It's like you just emerged from the ground!"

Norman blinks a couple times. Either he's still dreaming right now, or something weird just happened to him that others witnessed as well. If it's the second option, this raises a *lot* of questions

"Uh," Norman stammers, hurriedly thinking of a response as to not look weird. "It was my costume?"

“Is your costume really *that* amazing?” Evan asks, popping a jelly bean into his mouth. “How’d you manage to win by just being a peanut?”

Sighing, Norman readjusts the humongous bag of candy in his arms. “Like I know, either...”

That’s a lie. He knows it’s because he jumped from the ground like a performing dolphin, but he’s not about to tell Evan that.

“Eh, well, works for me! Free candy!” Evan shrugs, emptying the rest of the jellybean pack into his mouth.

Norman laughs dryly. After what happened tonight, his stomach might just explode if he tried eating any candy, so he’ll probably just let Evan have most of it.

Honestly... What even *was* this whole night? At this point, Norman is pretty convinced that his ground-diving fiasco was in fact, *not* a dream; in fact, he’s still seeing flashes of the structures below him even while walking back home with Evan. It’s just *bizarre*.

While deep in contemplation, Norman nearly trips over a crack in the ground. He yelps before catching himself with his other leg and stumbling to regain his balance. “*Evan!* You were supposed to warn me!”

“Oh shit, my bad!” Evan says, mouth full of various candies. “Uhhh, walk slower? We’re almost there!” He pauses to swallow the sweets. “How’d you even lose your glasses?”

“Bumped into someone,” Norman winces. He’s technically not lying.

“That loser shoulda paid you,” Evan huffs. “Those things are *not* cheap.”

“It’s not *that* bad... I’ve still got a spare.”

“You would have had two spares if it didn’t get lost!”

“That’s not how it works—okay, *sure*, fine. They probably should have paid me.”

“See! You know I’m right!”

Norman lets out a sincere laugh this time, feeling the uncertainty on his mind wash away like sand on a beach. No matter what, he can always count on Evan to cheer him up somehow.

Once the two stop at a crossroad, Norman hands Evan half of his candy; then, they wave goodbye and start off towards their own homes. Now, being alone with his thoughts again, Norman properly thinks about what just happened to him.

First, he entered the party hall. Nothing unusual. Then, he started to feel a bit overwhelmed and shut down—only then did the weird stuff start to happen. He felt like he was *underwater*, and he could perfectly see through the ground, which cannot be normal. As if the gods were listening to him, the ground flashes to be translucent *again*. If it’s constantly recurring, then there must be something going on here.

Just to test his theory, Norman glances around to check if anybody is looking at him. After confirming he’s completely alone in the dark night, he squats down and places his palm on the sidewalk.

“Okay, let’s see... Can you work for me again?” Norman asks. “Uh... please?”

And just like that, his hand sinks into the ground, as if plunging into a pool. He can see *clearly* that it's within the pavement, perfectly unharmed and whole. Curious, he swishes his arm around a couple times, pleasantly surprised to find that it moves around just as if it's submerged in water.

Since this is clearly *not* a dream and he can perfectly replicate the results, then that must mean... this is some sort of a new ability—which reminds Norman of all the superheroes he's been so interested in.

There's no way, right?

Upon his realization, Norman yanks his arm out of the sidewalk and finds with relief that it's still as normal as ever. But, in this case, that must mean he's gained some sort of superpower, just like those heroes... he'll *really* need to think about this later.

On the rest of his walk home, Norman contemplates whether he should tell his brother about the whole deal. He already ruled out saying anything to Evan, because as much as he values Evan as a friend, that guy *cannot* keep a secret to save a life. His brother, on the other hand...

Zaeden had always told Norman to alert him if something ever goes wrong, but Norman does not really want to cause any more trouble for his brother than he already has to deal with. Zae already has to take care of him most days, and with the added stress that his little brother might have *superpowers*... He's not sure.

Once he finally approaches his doorstep, Norman opens the door and enters the house to the sight of Zaeden sprawled out on the couch, watching some horror movie with a bowl of popcorn in front of him.

"Norman!" Zaeden greets, waving enthusiastically. "How'd the party go? Anything interesting happen?"

"I won the costume party and got some candy," Norman says, cleanly lying. He decides Zaeden doesn't have to know, for both of their sakes. It's not like he'll ever use his powers except to maybe hide from people sometimes, anyway. "Other than that, it was nothing big at all."

He's done thinking about this crazy stuff. Whatever concerns might linger is for future Norman to take care of. For the rest of the night, Norman is going to enjoy his time and watch horror movies with his brother, unbothered and carefree, just as usual.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: norman completely breaks his own code and gets involved in hero shit.
what can you expect

wouldn't hurt a fly, but more than willing to fight for one

Chapter Summary

your true light shines when you're willing to help.

Chapter Notes

starting off the new year with some worm boy action >:3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Of all things his anxiety can predict, this was *not* how Norman expected his day to go.

He, just like any other civilian in the world, is quite used to news of villain attacks occurring around in the city. Norman has also experienced a couple Level 4 threats in his time, where he holed himself up in the bunker and waited for the attack to pass. However, in his fourteen years of life, he has never, *ever* been caught directly in the middle of a sudden rampage.

Norman and Evan are hanging out in a drink store, waiting for their boba tea to be served, when a gigantic metal fist smashes into the sidewalk in front of the entrance. Everybody in the store screams and scrambles towards the nearest exit, except for Evan, who reaches to grab a random unopened drink on the counter before ducking out.

“What?” Evan says when he finds Norman frowning at his drink. “I paid for a drink, so I’m getting one!”

As Norman and Evan rush out of the store, Norman takes about five steps before hearing a scream and skidding to a stop. There are people out there who are in trouble! Now that he has *powers*, there is no excuse for him to just run away, right?

“Uhhh, I’ve got a piano lesson!” Norman blurts.

“During a fucking *villain attack?!* ” Evan shouts back, bewildered.

Norman is already taking off in another direction. “Go on without me!”

Once he’s out of Evan’s sight, Norman ducks behind a pile of bricks and takes a deep breath. *Okay, Norman*, he thinks, closing his eyes. *You can do this. Just let yourself sink into the floor...* To his relief, his powers still work; Norman drops through the ground as if plunging through a frozen lake. Once underground, the surface over him becomes visible, and he can spot the exact points where there are broken structures piled up. He can also finally get a good look at the villain (albeit from below) and sees the local hero organization fighting to minimize damage. Well, if they’re taking care of the bad guy, then maybe he can help in some other areas?

Swimming around, Norman searches above him for any trouble, and he hears somebody crying—the same voice as the scream he heard earlier. Alarmed, he turns towards the voice, finding a small

child trapped within a circle of rubble, leg pinned underneath a slab of rock.

I'll just pop out from the ground next to them, Norman plans. And I'll try to get them out from the inside—wait, is jumping out of the floor creepy? Maybe that'll scare the kid! But I can't get in from the outside otherwise and I—oh, whatever! Here goes nothing!

Deciding to settle for a compromise, Norman only sticks his torso above the ground, to which the child gasps with surprise.

“Hey there,” Norman greets. “I’m here to help! I’ll lift the rock that’s trapping your leg, so crawl away as fast as you can when I push it up!”

Mouth still hanging wide open, the kid nods, and Norman dives back into the ground. He lifts his arms to push the concrete up from beneath (though only slightly, since it’s *really* heavy—much more than he expected. He’s not sure how much more his weak nerd arms can take), and the kid wriggles out safely. Relieved, Norman sinks back into the ground and leaps back to the surface like a dolphin breaking waves.

“You’re like a worm man! You came through the ground!” the kid exclaims, no longer scared. “Are you a superhero?”

Well, he *technically* is—but more like a vigilante on his first day out. With no experience. Or costume. Oh *gosh*, he’s still in his normal clothes...

Oh, well. There’s nothing Norman can really do about it now, except hope that he won’t run into anybody he knows. He chooses to play along with the kid, since it’ll make them feel safer. Putting a finger to his lip, he replies, “Yes, but don’t tell anyone! I have to keep my identity a secret!”



The kid nods enthusiastically, which Norman takes as a good sign. Then, with a smile, Norman offers his hand to the child. “Okay! I’ll get you out of here! Just follow my lead, okay?”

Really, Norman has *no* idea what he’s doing. But when the kid grabs his hand, he knows he has to trek onward regardless of such.

Having seen the layout of the rubble from below, Norman has a vague idea of which direction to head in. The trip out is not easy in any way; Norman has to push aside a couple more blocks of concrete to clear a safe path. One nearly smashes his face in, but Norman remembers that he can dive into the ground at the last second before the rock collapses. A few metal scraps also tear some holes in his sweater (dang it, he really liked this one) and his braid comes undone somewhere along the way—but the kid is safe with only a couple scratches, and that’s what really matters.

“We’re almost out,” Norman says. “We just have to get past this pile of rocks! Do you think you can crawl through that little opening?”

Nodding, the kid squeezes through the small crack leading outside. Norman, doubting he can pass through, opts to swim through the ground and meet the kid at the other side. Once he emerges, he notices that there’s still a fight in the distance.

“We still have to be careful,” he whispers to the kid. “The battle isn’t over yet.”

“It’s okay!” the kid replies cheerfully, pointing ahead. “The heroes are here to save us!”

Norman’s eyes track where the kid points, finding two costumed figures moving rubble at the building in front of them. One is dressed in knight armor with blue and gold accents, and the other wears tech armor with a full helmet... Welsknight and XVoid from HC.

It seems as if the kid’s comment alerted the two heroes, because the two turn right towards their direction. And that is also when Norman realizes that these heroes’ first and only impression of him will be his cracked glasses and all his disheveled glory on the verge of a panic attack or two. *That* is a fate worse than death.

In a frenzied rush, Norman ducks behind the child as the two heroes approach him (“Really? Are you *scared* of those grown-ups?”). There’s no way he can let them see him! They’ll scold him for being reckless and heading into danger on his own, or even worse, judge him silently in their heads! How will he even talk to these two professional *adults* at this point?!

“Hey, kids, are you alright?” Welsknight calls out. Oh *gosh*, they’re this close already? Norman claws around for anything to hide his face and grabs a random paper bag, quickly punching two holes for the eyes and throwing it over his head.

“We’re okay!” the kid responds. “This awesome hero over here just saved me! He just went into the ground like *pop* and helped me from the inside!”

Well, that’s the end for him. *I am so dead*, Norman thinks. With nothing left to do, Norman crawls out from behind the kid and stands up to accept his fate.

“Yeah... I, uh, heard someone calling for help and went in,” he explains, trying not to look at the two heroes’ terrifying faces. “I’m not exactly a hero... this is kinda my first time.”

“Ah, is that so?” XVoid says. “You’ve done excellent work here for your first time, then! What’s your name?”

“N—” Norman freezes. He can’t just compromise his identity like that; he’ll need to think of some alias. “Worm... man,” he decides on a whim, remembering what the child called him. *Oh goodness*, he’s already regretting it—what kind of a stupid name is that? Norman wants to hide behind the paper bag on his head for the rest of his life.

But instead of laughing, XVoid nods. Even though his face is hidden under the helmet, Norman can tell the superhero is smiling. “Well, Worm-Man, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Hehe, you’re a worm man!” the kid repeats gleefully.

“I guess I am,” Norman sighs with a smile spreading onto his face.

XVoid then winks, which displays on his helmet’s electric visor. “You know, we could use more heroes with a righteous heart like yours...”

“You should give ‘em our card!” Welsknight suggests while smacking away a bad guy with a comically large sledgehammer. “How would you like to join us, kid?”

“Oh, right!” XVoid digs around in his utility belt for the aforementioned card, finally finding it after a few seconds. He holds it out to Norman. “Here it is, to consider. We can help with training and costuming if you join. You don’t have to accept, but feel free to contact us any time if you decide.”

Join them? He’s not getting punished for vigilantism? Or coming out of that whole ordeal looking like he was put through a paper shredder? He’s getting offered a *job*? And he assumes they don’t realize he’s a kid, either—not with him being, like, six feet tall (or 182 cm). How will he deal with school? Or tell his family? Should he even let them know?

But his own thoughts can’t stop his reflexes, as he instantly takes the card XVoid offers to him. Once he realizes what he’s done, Norman *knows* what he’s committing to. Since he took the card, they’ll be expecting him to make some sort of a response. He’ll be a hero — a registered *superhero* — one of the city’s great defenders. He’s sure that this is in fact, the stupidest decision he’s made since that time he ate an entire bag of peanuts in fifth grade.

There’s just too many variables that Norman doesn’t have an answer to. This can get him in *serious* danger if he’s not careful, and he doesn’t want to deal with that right now. But if he joins, he’ll be able to help people and save lives...

Maybe. *Maybe*. He’ll consider it.

“Thanks,” Norman says, tucking the card in his pocket. “I’ll think about it.”

The heroes escort Norman and the kid to safety, and Norman returns home with torn-up clothes, a job offer, and a whole lot on his mind.

He first changes out into something else, then immediately opens his computer to start researching. Norman already knows a great deal about HC from the news, but he’ll have to really look into the association if he wants to join them. All the while he scrolls through articles, he fidgets with the card in his hand to try and calm his nerves.

Norman ends up not finding much new information, only more articles supporting their good reputation. Surely, they’ve been living up to that image, so it should be reliable...

Okay. Zaeden isn’t home right now. Zaeden doesn’t *need* to know. He’s going to do it. He’ll just call to figure out his situation and ask if he can have any accommodations. And if it doesn’t work out, then it is what it is.

Norman holds up his phone and finally punches in the numbers on the card.

next chapter: the can of beans get forcefully pried open.

amazing art this chapter by my friend [xy!](#) :D

in case it doesnt show up in the chapter, here's a [link](#)

the firefly can't burn forever

Chapter Summary

all secrets are revealed eventually.

Chapter Notes

final chapter, eh? let's get this bread baby

mild content warning for mentions of blood and injury!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The only thought running through Norman's head as he practically drags himself across the sidewalk is "*I've totally screwed up.*"

The only lights that guide him are the dim lamps in front of residential homes. There's blood slowly spreading from the cuts on his left arm and soaking his sleeve. His already brick-heavy backpack weighs down on him like a pressure hose, especially when his legs are practically on fire with bruises littering his calves and feet. Norman knows it's *bad* when he nearly trips over a crack in the road.

At least nobody broke my limbs, he thinks, trying to lighten his own situation just a little (though it hardly makes a difference when he stumbles over yet another crack).

Once Norman reaches home, he first peeks through the window to check if there's any movement inside. It's hard to see much through the curtains, but the only light that's visible is the corner lamp in the living room. Other than that, the house is completely quiet with no moving shadows in the room. Norman sighs in relief. Hopefully that means Zaeden is in his lab doing some crazy mad science stuff, so he can slip into his room without being noticed.

He cannot be more wrong.

The instant Norman pushes the door open, he's greeted with the chilling sight of Zaeden sitting on the couch, legs crossed and arms folded over his lap.

"Welcome back," Zaeden says coldly, voice monotone and hard.

Norman stands at the door, frozen like a deer in headlights. In previous instances of him coming home when Zaeden is around, his older brother was always doing other tasks like cooking or writing reports, never *waiting* for him to walk through the door. But Norman also realizes in previous instances of him coming home when Zaeden is around, he had never walked through the door half-past eight-o'clock, five entire hours after school ended.

"Where were you?" Zaeden snaps, not even bothering to offer a moment of respite. "I called you *two hours ago*. Care to explain why you haven't answered since then?"

As if on autopilot, Norman responds, “I was at swim practice.” He curses himself in his head for lying so smoothly, but it’s a necessary evil if he wants to survive this encounter.

“Nice try, but I called your coach,” Zaeden says, shattering any dreams of escape. “You quit the team two months ago.”

Oh gosh, he *did*, didn’t he? Norman scrambles around in his mind for another excuse, quickly settling on a lackluster but mostly effective response: “Okay fine, I did, but that was so I could play Cellars and Chimeras with Evan...”

“You were with *Evan*, huh?” Zaeden raises his voice, uncrossing his legs and standing up. “That’s really interesting, because I talked to him and he said he didn’t know where you were!”

At this exact moment, Norman’s status of “totally screwed” drops a tier into “totally, unimaginably, *inescapably* screwed.” How can he be so stupid as to assume Zaeden hasn’t exhausted every single contact he has already? Of *course* he talked to Evan!

“Norman Plays, tell me the truth,” Zaeden orders, his eyes boring right through Norman’s psyche. “*Where were you?*”

Zaeden’s death glare is a homing missile trained onto its target, trapping Norman right in its tracks. What is he supposed to do now? Lie further and tell Zaeden that he got attacked by a gang? Clearly, the first two attempts have failed spectacularly, leaving him between a rock and a hard place of pleading the fifth or attempting escape, neither of which will be effective against his brother. Norman opens his mouth in an attempt to defend himself one last time, but all that comes out is a disconnected stutter.

Without warning, Zaeden grabs Norman’s injured arm and pries it aside, exposing the blood pooling across his sleeve. Norman flinches, yanking it back despite the stabbing pain, his abrasive movement effectively hammering the nail in his self-constructed coffin of guilt.

“*I knew it*,” Zaeden mutters, loud enough for Norman to hear, but subdued enough as if it’s a curse directed at himself for his prolonged ignorance. “I knew it!” he repeats, this time a yell. “Who did this to you?!”

“Zaeden, no!” Norman shouts back defensively, holding his arm to his chest.

“Who did this?” Zaeden hisses, ignoring Norman’s apprehension. “Tell me *everything*. I’ll make sure they regret every decision in their *pathetic* little life that led up to—” He cuts himself off, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. “Sit down, Norman,” he says with his eyes still closed. “I’ll first get you patched up.”

Norman watches Zaeden walk briskly into his basement. If he was a worse person, he would have taken the opportunity to bolt upstairs, but Norman follows his brother’s command and carefully takes a seat on the couch. It’s still warm.

As he waits for what feels like an excruciatingly long expanse of time, Norman picks at the dirt in his fingernails to try and stave off the thoughts forming in his head. It hardly works—the guilt catches up to him in the end. Just how long has Zaeden known? When did he start noticing the web of lies being constructed?

Zaeden returns less than a minute later, carrying the first aid box in his arms. Norman lowers his head as to not make eye contact, but even still, Zaeden’s concerned eyes weigh down on his neck.

“Hold out your arm,” Zaeden commands. Norman does so without question and without raising his

head.

As Zaeden cleans the wound on his arm, Norman braces himself for Zaeden to start yelling at him any second now. But Zaeden doesn't. He stays silent for most of the process, only asking Norman to move his arm occasionally. It's only at the end when he speaks again, but it's not angry shouts as Norman had expected.

"I figured something had been going on for a few months now," Zaeden says, his voice low and soft. The statement isn't delivered in an accusatory manner at all, instead a revelation of a secret he had also been hiding in turn.

"...Why didn't you say anything?" Norman asks quietly, still staring at his arm instead of meeting Zaeden's eyes.

"I was hoping that you would tell me in your own time if I left it alone, but I should've known better," Zaeden says. Norman can sense the bitterness in Zaeden's words, but the poison is directed at himself for his neglect. "I, of all people, should've known you'd drag yourself across a desert with two broken legs if it meant you didn't have to ask anyone for help."

Norman swallows the saliva that has been pooling in his mouth.

And Zaeden continues.

"I don't know what made me think it wasn't my place to intervene. Whenever our parents aren't home, I was the one staring at the clock hands, wondering when you'd come back while dinner got cold. I had to ring the missed calls and send texts with no response for *hours*. I'd think you were kidnapped or hurt or worse, but you'd come home completely fine. And you'd go to your room without another word.

"Do you know how *worried* I was? At first I thought you were getting bullied, but then I looked into your absences a bit closer. You had a schedule. It didn't align with any clubs you said you joined, and Evan didn't know either. Then today you show up looking like you got run over by a truck. And all of my suspicions were confirmed."

Listening to Zaeden's words, Norman's face flushes red with shame. He thought he had been so sneaky with his job, trying his hardest not to alert Zaeden, but learning that his brother had caught on all along leads him to realize Zaeden might be carrying the guilt of letting him be injured without being able to take action.

He's been discovered and picked apart like a rack of fish bones in a cat's territory. He's going to have to leave behind the hero's life, isn't he?

Zaeden finishes bandaging Norman's arm and sets it down. "I already know the truth. But I want to hear it from you."

"Why do you need to hear it from me if you know it already?" Norman mumbles, staring at the nick in the carpet below his feet. "I'll just quit anyway since you know now."

"Good question. I have two answers for you: one is because I want you to be honest with me. The other is that it'll take the weight off your chest." Zaeden places a hand on Norman's shoulder, and warmth from the touch spreads, melting the frost seizing his muscles. "Your shoulders aren't meant to carry this burden alone. *You don't need to be afraid of asking for help.*"

This forces Norman to finally look up and meet his brother's gaze. Zaeden's face is grave, but there's a spark of genuine care in his eyes, one which burrows into Norman like a worm in soil.

Zaeden's right. He's been hiding his hero identity for long enough because he didn't want anyone else getting involved and possibly being hurt, but he realizes now that he's causing just as much pain by keeping the secret. Zaeden has been worrying for so long, so now it's time to finally come clean.

"You're right," Norman repeats his thoughts with a sigh. "I guess I'll tell you... I'm a superhero."

A smile spreads onto Zaeden's face. "I knew it. I thought I saw some drawings of costumes in your notebook!"

"What?! You saw those?" Norman exclaims. Oh, no! And he thought he'd hidden them so well!

"You need to actually close your notebooks once in a while, Normie," Zaeden chuckles while ruffling Norman's hair. "Now, tell me. Who do I have to teach a lesson for hurting you?"

"Hey—no fighting people!" Norman protests. "And it's not like I saw their faces, anyway!"

"What were they wearing?" Zaeden pushes on, grabbing a notebook and pen. "Any idea about their code names? I can get pretty far with just that, if you'd like—"

"*Zaeden!*" Norman shouts. "I'm fine! They've all been captured anyway!"

"Oh, they're behind bars? That makes it easier for me, then." Zaeden throws his head back and laughs once he spots the appalled look on Norman's face. "I'm kidding! I'm not gonna do anything. I'd rather spend my time making sure you're alright instead of chasing down some supervillains."

Norman breathes a sigh of relief. For some reason, he's not quite convinced that Zaeden has let go of it, but he'll take the win for now.

"But I'm glad you told me, kid," Zaeden says as a soft smile spreads onto his face. "I won't tell our parents if you don't want me to."

"Oh, I'm *definitely* not telling them." Norman returns a grin. "But from now on, I won't keep any more crazy secrets from you."

Smiling wider, Zaeden opens his arms without another word. Norman recognizes the cue and leans into his brother, returning with a tight embrace. After an entire day of fighting and running, nothing is more comforting to Norman than Zaeden's quiet heartbeat against his own chest. It's knowing that someone will always be there for him no matter what and having someone else to trust for all his troubles. At this moment, Norman can't be more grateful that his brother is *this* understanding.

"Actually, I'm surprised that through this whole conversation you didn't ask me to quit," Norman remarks in the middle of their hug. "I mean... I can if you want me to. I'm sure the others will understand."

"Oh no, you don't have to stop being a superhero," Zaeden replies nonchalantly. "I can still keep an eye on your shenanigans. Because I'm gonna quit *my* job to join you."

"WHAT?" Norman tears himself out of the hug out of shock. "Aren't you the lead scientist for the mechanics division?!"

"Don't worry!" Zaeden waves his hand in a much-too-casual manner. "They've got Sam to take over my position! I think he'll just do fine. He's just as brilliant as me and definitely less insane, so he's a much better candidate if I do say so myself—"

“Are you sure, though?” Norman asks, still concerned. Though he hasn’t been in HC for long, the members have been nothing but kind to him, but he still can’t be certain if they’ll hire Zaeden, seeing as he doesn’t have any powers.

“Never been more certain in my life!” Zaeden announces proudly. “Next time, you’re bringing me straight to the headquarters, got it?”

Norman can’t help but to be a bit flabbergasted at first, but he supposes having Zaeden with him in HC won’t be so bad. He expects Zaeden to find some way in, regardless of if he’s accepted or not. And his next shift is tomorrow, so the timing can’t be more convenient...

Except it isn’t. Zaeden forces Norman to stay home the next day, claiming “he needs more rest if he wants to stop looking like he got beat up at the back of an alley.” Norman begrudgingly complies after realizing he woke up a full two hours later than usual, having slept through his alarm.

As a consequence of staying home, Norman also opens his phone to fifty panic messages from Evan.

tax evander: normie where are you im goign to throw up and cry

tax evander: CLASS STSRTS IN THREE MINUTES WHY ARE YOU GONE

tax evander: please respond did you get blown over by a big gust of wind yesterday

tax evander: I CANT DO THIS BY MYSELF I DIDNT BRING MY PREALGEBRA BOOKS

tax evander: NORRRMRIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

tax evander: i would cut class rn but the teachers threatened to expel me if i left another time this month

tax evander: THATS IT IM COMING TO YOUR HOSEU LATER

“No, he can’t come over!” Norman gasps out loud after reading the message. If Evan sees him all battered up, he’ll suspect something for sure!

BanaNorman: WAIT NO ITS FINE I JUST HAVE A COLD

tax evander: DONT CARE I NEED TO SEE MY SPECIALEST BOY TO LIVE

tax evander: prepare for my arrival OH FUCK SLAB SEES ME WITH MY PHONE OUT BYE

“ZAE!” Norman yells, to which his brother instantly bursts into his room. *Was he just waiting outside this whole time?* “Can you *please* put caution tape all over my door? I’m *begging* —Evan can’t come in!”

“You sure?” Zaeden raises an eyebrow as he leans against the doorframe. “I can just tell him to leave.”

“That’s not gonna stop him!”

“And a few rolls of plastic paper will?”

“...Touché.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll talk him out of trying to see you,” Zaeden assures, patting his chest proudly. “My will is tough as steel!”

A few hours later, Evan shows up at their door, as expected. Norman sits with anticipation, trying to make out the conversation between Zaeden and Evan, though he can only hear a couple keywords like “sick” and “not today” and “cookies.” Why are they talking about *cookies*?

Norman gets his answer when his phone pings with Zaeden's text.

Zae: i gave in. he employed shawn's baking

Norman: WHAT

Zae: enjoy the cookies because i know i will

Norman: ZAEDEN I TRUSTED YOU

Not even a second later, Norman's door bursts open to reveal Evan in his full chains-and-choker glory, panting like a dehydrated chihuahua while holding a plate of snickerdoodle cookies.

"NORMIE!" he shouts, bursting forward with excitement.

"Evan, wait!" Norman shrieks, yanking his bedsheets up to hide the bruise on his neck. "Stay back! I'm uh, really sick! I have the flu!" Just to add to the believability, he coughs twice.

"Don't worry, I'm vaccinated!" Evan exclaims, stopping before Norman's bed and dropping into a kneel. "Woah dude, holy shit," he mumbles with an uncharacteristic contrast to his previous fervor. "How the fuck did you get a black eye from the flu? Is that a new symptom this year?"

"Uhh—" Norman stutters, pulling out the most ridiculous excuse conceivable by man. "I, uh, fell off a cliff while hiking...? And landed in the cold water?"

"Holy shit, you're a dumbass," Evan snorts. "At least you're alive! Or else I would've fought the big guys up there myself!"

At least Evan believes his awful excuse, Norman thinks. That's one less person to spill his secret to.

After crossing that threshold, Norman relaxes and allows the tension to dissipate. His main concern for Evan seeing him was that he'd question all the injuries, though Evan doesn't seem to show any suspicion at all, so maybe it's okay to let his guard down a little.

Evan then proceeds to dump out a pile of papers from his backpack. "Got some assignments for you. There's only homework for English and chemistry. Mr. Slab actually excused you, ya' lucky fucking bastard! You'll still help me with the problems though, right?"

"You know what?" Norman reaches for his own backpack next to his nightstand, pulling out his pencil and calculator. "We can do your math homework together. I need a little warm-up anyway."

"You, my friend, are a saint," Evan says while pretending to wipe away a tear. "What would I do if you actually died and went to heaven?"

"Cheat off Examlet, probably?" Norman giggles. "Or you can actually pay attention in class."

"Never in a million years!" Evan exclaims, yanking out a piece of crumpled paper out of his backpack. "Now get mathing!"

For the next fifteen minutes or so, the two simply eat the cookies Evan's brother baked and chat about what Norman missed while solving math problems. Norman learns that during his absence, a giant fight broke out in the cafeteria, a baseball shattered the Spanish room's window, and the history teacher put on a movie during the class. Now Norman wishes he had gone to school anyway in spite of his injuries.

"Yeah, shit got fucking crazy," Evan remarks with a mouth full of cookies. "I think I saw a whole-ass *rotisserie chicken* fly across the room. I don't know who's crazy enough to carry that in their backpack, but whatever."

“I would’ve thought you’d steal it for yourself,” Norman chuckles, punching a few numbers into the calculator.

Evan fake-gags. “Ew no, that thing hit the floor! Do you *know* how many mystery drinks have spilled over that surface? No thanks Normie, I’ve got standards.”

The two take about ten more minutes to complete Evan’s math homework, just in time for him to get a text from his brother.

“Shawn’s asking if I’m done,” Evan groans, checking his phone. “Guess he wants me back home.” Evan packs his homework and stands up, leaving for the door. “Seeya later! And enjoy the rest of the cookies!”

“Bye!” Norman waves back. “Thank you for bringing the homework!”

Evan shoots a peace sign over his head before he takes off down the hall. Norman listens to his friend’s footsteps gradually grow farther away with every step he takes until the door opens and subsequently slams shut.

After a moment, Zaeden enters the room again with two glasses of water and glances around, presumably looking for Evan. “Oh, did he leave already?”

Norman answers with a nod and pushes forward the plate of cookies. “He left the cookies, though. Kinda wished they were peanut butter cookies, but the snickerdoodle is still great.”

“Good lord,” Zaeden sighs, placing a glass of water on Norman’s nightstand. “You’re already injured; I’m not taking you to the hospital for another reason!”

“The epipen will delay it long enough for me to eat normally!” Norman says, grinning mischievously. “It’s just like your T shots!”

“You did *not* just compare your allergies to testosterone.”

“They’re both injections!”

“I’m ending this conversation.” Zaeden extends his palm, gesturing with a grabby-hand. “Relinquish the baked goods, brother!”

Norman hands Zaeden the remaining cookies with a grin, and his brother departs from the room shortly after, leaving him alone once more.

Now by himself, Norman spends the rest of the day completing his homework and catching up with lessons, though not without considerable pondering about everything that happened in the last twenty-four hours. It’s an alien feeling, considering the new status quo moving forward from this day. He started off as just a normal student, doing homework and studying and whatnot, until it all shifted when he manifested his powers. And after that, he embarked on his first rescue mission, leading him to be recruited by HC. For months, he told nobody about his job until now, where his older brother now knows all about his heroism.

With the previous shift in his life, Norman thought nothing would ever feel normal again. But it eventually smoothed out; he got used to juggling missions with his school life relatively fast. But now, with this shift of letting his secret slip... for some reason, Norman doesn’t feel like much has changed at all. Maybe it’s because Zaeden was relatively chill about it? Regardless, deciding to tell Zaeden proved to be not as terrible as he anticipated, especially with Zaeden up and quitting his job to join HC. Even with all these changes, Norman knows that deep down, he can trust his brother.

Zaeden values Norman as much as his entire life, so there's no question he'd keep him and their secret safe.

Norman briefly considers how he'll break the news to Evan, but he quickly pushes that thought away. Evan is his best friend, of course, but does he *really* need to know that urgently? It's not like they spend all of their free time together... Okay, maybe they do (as embarrassed as he is to admit this, Evan *is* his only friend right now), but there's no point in telling Evan right this instant. For now, this part of his life can stay between him and Zaeden.

Having solved this mini dilemma, Norman picks his pencil back up and continues his homework with a clear mind. He decides he'll tell Evan someday, of course. Just... later, especially with that big mouth of his. The only thing he'll need to worry about *now* is his brother embarrassing him in front of the other heroes.

And for once, Norman is quite content with that.

Chapter End Notes

and that's all! thank you so much for sticking with norman's journey into heroism!
now all i have to do before starting the tgms sequel is to finish tkd ;D

End Notes

huge thanks to my beta readers sky and xy! :D

feel free to chat with me on tumblr or instagram under the same username :]

if you want to see more of the au, check out the art ive made for this au [here](#) and some awesome [fanart](#) others have made!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!