

THE
LOSER LIST
REVENGE OF
THE LOSER

written and Illustrated by

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SCHOLASTIC PRESS / NEW YORK

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ISBN 978-0-545-39926-5

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12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 12 13 14 15 16 17/0

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First printing, May 2012

* CHAPTER ONE *

Ty Randall must die.

That's what I vowed as I sat in the cafeteria, watching him take over the lunch table, the school, and the only girl I ever liked. After an excruciating hour, I'd had about all I could take.

And I'd started lunch period feeling good. Really good. I had just finished drawing my new comic book, and couldn't wait to show it to Emma, Morgan, Sophie, and Kendra. As I looked around for Jasper, I patted my backpack to make sure it was still there.



Drawing is what I live for, pretty much. There's nothing like getting the stink lines on a smelly sock just right, and hearing the girl next to me in pre-alg say, "Wow – did you copy that out of a book, or something?"



"Yo, Danny!" My best friend, Jasper, shouted across the cafeteria. We'd eaten lunch together almost every day since we started Gerald Ford Middle School. I like how he does his own thing, no matter how unpopular it is – having a toy band, chess-boxing, or collecting weird animals.

* JASPER AT-A-GLANCE

Personality: Freakishly
smart

Goal: To put a vending
machine in his
locker

Wears: Two different-colored
sneakers

Eats: Swedish Fish ("for the
riboflavin")

Ratio of action figures to
friends: 8 to 1

TreKKers.
Not TreKKies!



For the fifth day in a row, he'd nailed us a spot at a table I thought of as Semi-Normal, a step up from our usual spot at Tech Geeks. It was mostly girls, and they didn't seem to be an official clique. They're not the ones writing hottie lists in the second floor bathroom. They're the ones you'd want as your lab partner, or sitting behind you in percussion ensemble.



Sophie De Mano



Emma Priestly

Reputation: Likeable
gum-chewer

Enjoys: Wacky
Wednesdays

Reputation: Bookish,
semi-funny

Last read: More
Dog Stories



Morgan

Chatterjee



Kendra

Maxtone-Cousins

Reputation: Mad
scrapbooker

AKA: "Picasso with
unicorn stickers"

Reputation: Cute
overachiever

Screensaver: Insects
of the World

I kept waiting for someone to stop Jasper and me from sitting there. On the food chain at school, we're a quarter of the way up. We're not outcasts, but no one's texting us about the latest party, either.

* FIVE TEXTS I'VE NEVER GOTTEN:



The girls at the table seemed to tolerate us, even if they didn't exactly talk to us. The moment we slap our trays down, I'm always nervous. Would we get away with it again? As I hovered near the table, Emma looked up from her book. She moved over to make room, and my chest felt lighter. We were in.

"So, Petrokis and I were debating best superpower..."

This was Jasper's idea of a good opener. He doesn't get that you have to talk differently when girls are around. They don't want to hear about the latest sci-fi movie, and in what direction it reeked.

"He said mind control." Jasper bit into a sandwich.

"But I said -"

That sent Emma straight back to her book.

Meanwhile, I was plotting out my big Vampire Slugs reveal. I couldn't



just say, "Look what I did!" No, it had to be more offhand. . . .

I reach for a sandwich, and Vampire Slugs spills out of my backpack. Emma picks it up, intrigued. "What's this?"

"Oh, 's nothing," I say, but Emma swipes it and reads every word.

"You . . . you drew this?"

I shrug modestly. Now Morgan and Sophie are straining for a look. . . .

"Danny!" Jasper thumped me on the arm. "Did you even hear what I said?"

"I missed the part about teleporting."

As he launched into his rant, I slapped my backpack on the table. Time to unveil my masterpiece. I tilted the backpack to release the comic. Nothing came out – just crumbs. Where was it? I turned the backpack upside down, and THWAP! A torrent of paper, garbage, and Cool Ranch Doritos blasted the table.

Emma gasped. "You're getting chips all over me!"

"GEEZ." Morgan sighed.



Even Jasper asked, "What are you doing?"

"Trying to find my... um..." I tried to think of something cool. "Frisbee."

"Frisbee?" Jasper repeated.

Where was the freakin' comic? I stuck my hand in – Vampire Slugs was wedged in a side pocket. I pulled it out violently, spraying more Doritos, and kicking off another round of cries.

"Danny!" Morgan brushed off her shirt, and Sophie sighed.

Now everyone was mad. But... there it was.

"Is that your new comic?" Jasper reached for it.

"What comic?" Despite her annoyance, Emma sounded curious.

Jasper held Vampire Slugs up so everyone could see it.

Just like I'd hoped!

"Is this the sequel to Mutant Maggots With Bad Breath?" asked Jasper.

"No!" I said. The title was embarrassing. "That was, like, a million years ago."

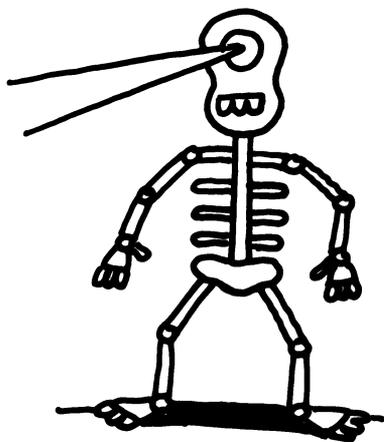
"Hey." Sophie pointed to an X-ray monster. "This is kind of funny."

YESSS!!

This was it – the moment I'd been waiting for. "See, my major influences are –" I leaned in.

Emma's and Sophie's heads turned. "TY!!!" they called out.

A tall guy with caramel-colored hair and rimless glasses sailed by. He stopped and blinked, as if trying to remember who they were.



"Okay if I sit here?" He was out of breath.

"No room at the other table." He pointed to a bunch of soccer players.

The girls fell over each other to clear a spot.

"Definitely!" "Right here!" "Plenty o' space!"

Emma's leg pushed against me. "Move over."

"Who's Ty?" Jasper chomped a French fry.

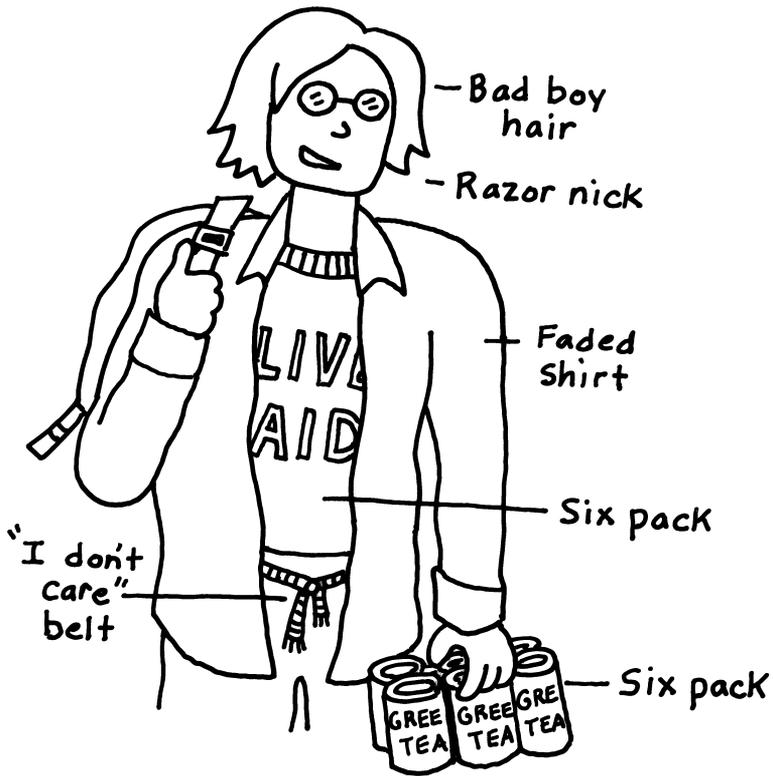
"Ty Randall." Emma lowered her voice. "The new guy. From California."

I'd seen him around, talking earnestly. My coolness radar – "cool-dar" – pegged him as someone to watch out for. New kids in school usually have to prove themselves – by getting into a fight, mouthing off to a teacher, or hitting a long home run. But he seemed pre-approved, somehow.

As soon as he sat down, the energy changed abruptly. The girls started fidgeting with their headbands, bracelets, or juice boxes. Everyone's eyes were glued to Ty.

It was maddening.

He dumped his stuff on the table: a slim notebook – not the clunky spiral kind our moms



bought us, but a leather bound one with graph paper. A brightly colored CD tumbled out, and some leafy thing wrapped in tinfoil.

"Eggplant burrito," he explained, while people stared.

My stomach sank. How could I get everyone's attention back?

"Hey, Ty." Morgan pointed to Ty's CD. "What's that?"

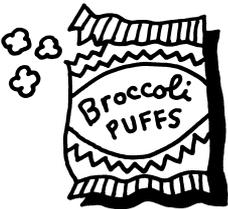
"Sierra Leone All Stars," he said. "Awesome."
Sophie tilted her head. "I think I've heard of them."

Right.

"Yeah?" Ty bit into his burrito. "You like world music?"

There were excited murmurs. "For sure," Morgan said loudly. Suddenly they were all great fans.

* WHAT'S (PROBABLY) IN TY'S BACKPACK



Healthy
snacks



Natural fibers
tube sock



Non-violent
video games

Ty sighed. "I hope there'll be African drumming in Green-a-palooza," he said. Everyone leaned in to hear more. "It's this Earth Day festival I'm putting on with different acts about the environment and global warming."

More oohs and ahhs. Was there anything this guy wouldn't do to impress girls?

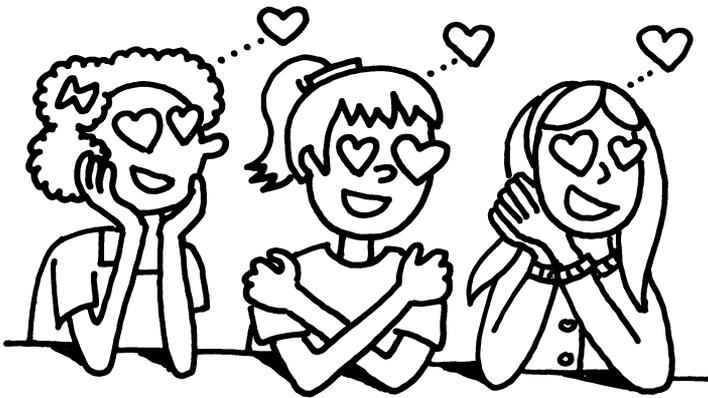
"That's so great," Emma breathed, nodding her head strenuously.

"Student council could help," said Kendra.

I broke into a sweat. How could we get off climate change and back to Vampire Slugs? Ty had hijacked my one moment of glory! Those girls had been complimenting my stuff before he showed up. Picking up the comic, I waited for an opening.

"Where will it be held, Ty?"

"You need volunteers?"



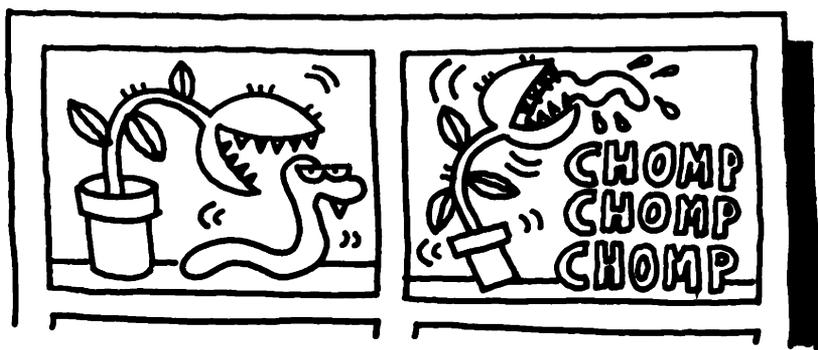
I had to jump in.

"So, Vampire Slugs, yeah, it was just this idea I had..." I must have been shouting, because everyone turned.

"Hey," Ty pointed at me. "Let me see that."

A second later, I realized Ty meant my comic book. I passed it to him, hoping that would get the girls' attention. Their eyes grazed the cover as it traveled down the table.

Ty didn't crack a smile as he paged through it. "I never saw a plant with teeth before."



"Guess you don't get around much." I shrugged.

"So, about this festival..." Emma said.

"Yeah! Sorry." He tossed the book back to me, ending the world debut of Vampire Slugs. I left it on the table, in case anyone else wanted to see it. Hopeful, I looked around: Emma? Sophie?

My chest felt very heavy, all of a sudden.

Ty blabbed on about Stupid-palooza. Never before had such kickin' entertainment been lined up for such a worthy cause. It would single-handedly reverse the melting of the Arctic ice cap, end world hunger, and cure cancer. Or something like that.

All I knew was I'd drawn the greatest comic of my life, and no one was looking at it.

"Green-a-pa-wt/AT?" Chantal came up to the table, catching the tail end of Ty's rant. She's the biggest diva in our class, a major



busybody, and the self-appointed boss of seventh grade. If some big event was going on, she had to be in on it. "What's this I hear about a show?"

"It's an Earth Day Festival," Ty said.

"You need singers for that?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Sure," Ty said. "The music'll be traditional. You know - folk songs."

Chantal stroked her chin. "You call Beyoncé traditional?"

"Um—" He coughed.

"Yo, Ty—"

"TY!"

People kept coming up to him. How had he gotten so well-known already? More people had talked to Ty during lunch than had talked to me since the start of middle school. I felt completely invisible.

"Hey... Ty?"

I knew that voice.

Whoa.

Double whoa.



It was Asia O'Neill, my secret crush. She was looking good in one of her weird outfits – a baseball jacket and ballet slippers. I don't know her well, but she's always carrying around something interesting.



She's smart, impatient, and a little sarcastic. When I saw her tap Ty on the shoulder, I looked away. Direct eye contact was out of the question.

"About the Green-a-palooza article," Asia said to Ty. "I wanted to follow up."

"Yeah," Ty said, smiling up at her.

"Could we do the interview in Free Period?"

"I – definitely." Ty was still smiling.

wt/AT??

My mind raced to take it all in. He knew Asia? It was one thing watching the girls at the table drool all over him, but... Asia?

This took it to a whole new level.

Ty was facing her now, saying something about "building awareness." And now she was nodding and smiling. Did this guy know how pompous he sounded? I couldn't believe Asia was swallowing it.

"Yeah, Ty," she said. "That's so true."

I couldn't take it! I kicked Jasper under the table.

"Ow!" he said. "What was that for?"

I felt my face get hot. My crush on Asia is so unmentionable, I've never even told him. So of course, he didn't get it.

It wasn't fair. I'd liked Asia since the first day of middle school, when I saw her in a striped shirt, quietly reading a graphic novel.



She seemed quirky, interesting, and mysterious, someone who wouldn't be interested in the typical kind of guy. If a girl was ever going to like me, it would be someone like her.

So why did the one girl I could maybe hit it off with have to fall under Ty's spell too?

My heart was beating like crazy.

"Hey - I've got this comic I just drew," I blurted out in desperation. Asia and Ty seemed startled.

I looked on the table, but it was gone. Frantically, I started moving sandwiches and napkins around. Where was it? Finally, I spotted a slice of the familiar yellow cover on the floor. YES! Reaching down to grab it, I realized that it was stuck - wadded under someone's hiking boot.

Emma was standing on it.

I yelped and she moved her foot, apologizing. My fantastic comic was completely trashed!



I felt like sobbing as I picked up the mangled papers.

Oh, man.

That's when I vowed to come up with my own brilliant project – something so big, so global, and so important, no one at school could ignore it. An event that would make Asia interview me for Happenings, the hard-hitting, take-no-prisoners newspaper of Gerald Ford Middle School.

Something that would make Asia look into my eyes and say, "Yeah, Danny. That's soooo true."