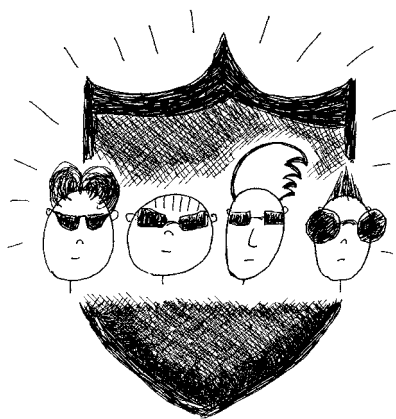


# STICK DUDES

THE SECRET FOUR-CE



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY  
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CHAPTER ONE

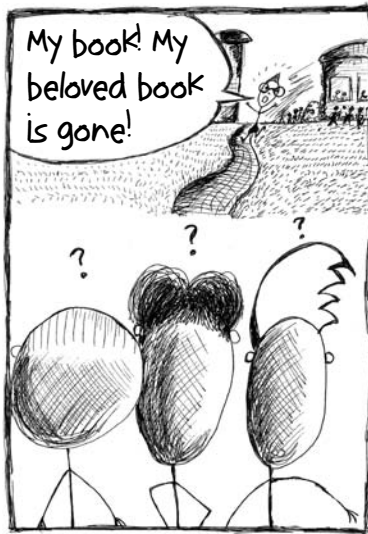
STOLEN!



I couldn't believe that me and my friends Tubs, Johnno, and Marty were finally about to find out if our plan to catch the Random Stuff Thief would work. They said, 'Ben,' (that's me) 'Ben, it's a crazy idea, but it just might work!' So now, here we were, me up a tree and Tubs and Johnno hiding behind some bushes next to the Thief's backyard, watching every move.

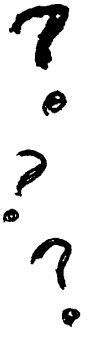
But I guess I should fill you in on how we ended up here in the first place. It all started at the beginning of this week at school. Tubs, Johnno and I were having lunch when Marty came running to us in a panic.

'I don't believe it!'



he cried. 'Someone's stolen my book!'

'It might've been a masked mob of librarians!' joked Johnno. 'Or a gang of super geeks!'



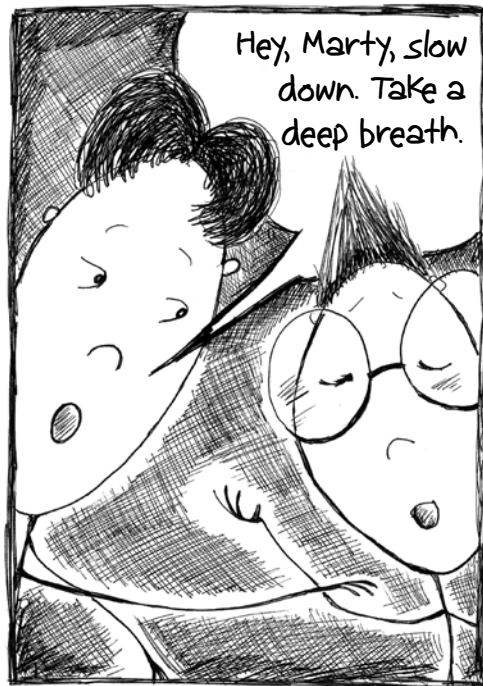
'That's not funny!' snapped Marty. 'What am I gonna do? My parents told me not



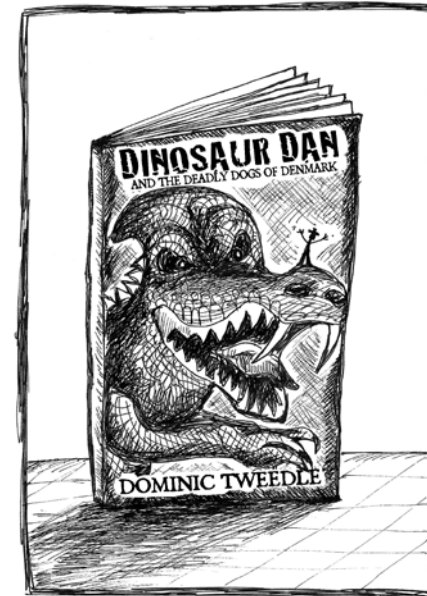
to take it to school 'cause it's really valuable and something might happen to it. They were right! Oh, no, this is the worst thing ever!

I had never seen Marty so upset.

'Hey, Marty, take a deep breath,' I said. 'Slow down and tell us exactly what's happened.'



I know I sounded like my mum saying that but I could tell that Marty needed someone to take him seriously.



'My book—*Dinosaur Dan and the Deadly Dogs of Denmark*—it's gone! It's a first edition signed by the author. And it's worth heaps of money! My uncle got it for me. You know the book I'm talking about, don't you?'



I glanced over at Johnno and Tubs. They shrugged. Marty was always talking about his precious books and the latest electronic gadgets. It was sometimes really hard for us to keep up.

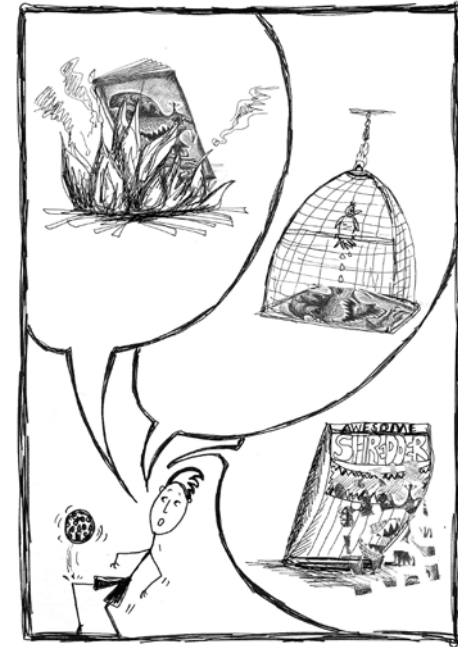
‘Oh, yeah, I remember,’ I lied, not wanting to hurt his feelings. ‘Where did you see it last?’

‘It was in my school bag,’ Marty croaked. ‘I went to get it so I could show Mr Graham. But it’s gone!’

‘Well, I’m sure it will show up somewhere,’ I said, patting Marty on the back.

‘Or you’ll never see it again,’ mumbled Johnno as he juggled his brand new soccer ball on his knees. ‘Maybe it’s been thrown onto a fire by now or put through an awesome shredder . . . or torn apart and some of the pages have been put on the bottom of a bird cage to catch

canary poop and stuff! In any case, I’m pretty sure it’s gone for good.’



Marty’s bottom lip dropped. I shook my head at Johnno. Talk about making someone feel worse.

‘Gee, Marty,’ sighed Tubs, biting into a donut. Tubs loved donuts. Actually he just loved food.



'Life sucks for you at the moment,' he said with his mouth full. 'You know, last week with your dog Buster, and now this. Do you want a bite of my vanilla-glazed donut? I always eat when I'm upset.'



'You always eat when you're happy . . . and angry too!' snapped Johnno. 'You never stop eating!'

'Well, I can't help it! I suffer from low blood sugar,' Tubs pouted.



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'More like you suffer from big-mouth-syndrome!'

Tubs and Johnno were now arguing loudly over the top of each other. Again I shook my head. I looked at Marty—he almost had tears in his eyes.

'WHOA! BREAK IT UP!' I shouted, stepping between Johnno and Tubs. 'This is about Marty's stolen book. He's really gutted. Look!'



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Tubs and Johnno stopped snapping at each other. They looked at Marty and felt guilty.

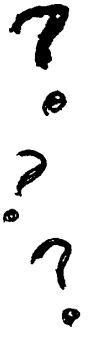
'Sorry Marty,' they mumbled together.

Suddenly a cry of 'NO WAY!' echoed across the schoolyard.



It was Remy Burns. Like us, he was in Grade 5—but in another class.

'NO WAY!' he groaned again, looking just as upset as Marty. 'SOMEONE HAS STOLEN MY FOOTBALL CARDS!'



'Looks like we've got a thief in the school!' I said. 'And I think it's up to us to find out who it is!'

