

DAWN OF THE DAVES

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LEARNING

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CHAPTER 1

DAVE ARRIVES

First there was just one Dave. Then there were loads of them.

Dave joined our class because his family had just moved to town. Or so he said.

He had blue eyes and blond hair parted on the right, so the left side flopped down over his forehead. His mouth was fixed in a grin. It never budged. He could have gone under a bus and crawled out smiling.

Dave made a lot of mistakes when he started here. Things you just don't do when you start at a new school.

Mistake number one: he was wearing a school blazer.

Blazers are an official part of our uniform, but no one ever, ever wears them. Sometimes a well-meaning aunt or uncle will buy one as a birthday present. And some poor guy will put up with the taunts of 'blazer boy' or 'blazer girl' for a couple of days before shoving it in the back of their wardrobe forever.

It's like coming in with a briefcase instead of a rucksack. You don't do it.

Mistake number two: he sat at the front of the class.

No one sits at the front. The cool gang sit at the back, then there's the moshers, then there's the rest of us, then there's an empty row of chairs at the front. Everyone knows that.

Mistake number three: he answered every single question Mr Baxter asked.

Let me get this straight. I have nothing against people who know stuff. I know stuff. My best friend Sarah knows stuff. But you don't join a new school and get every question right on your first day. That's asking for a bogwashing.

Bogwashing is the word for shoving someone's head down the toilet and flushing it, by the way. I'm pretty sure it's never actually happened. It's just a myth that gets passed on from one year of pupils to the next. But that doesn't stop me living in fear of a strong grip on the back of my neck every time I'm having a tinkle.

Anyway, no one gave Dave a bogwashing after that lesson. They didn't even tease him. They all crowded round to try and make friends with him, in fact. It was so strange.

I should have known something was wrong when Jade and Kieran from the cool gang sat next to him at the front of the class the next day.

It was all very weird. Not as weird as what was to come, of course. But nothing could be.

Sarah was the only other person who didn't fall under his spell.

"There's something wrong with him, Andy" she said to me. "His eyes are blank, like there's nothing behind them."

"That shouldn't make him stand out around here," I said.

"I don't mean he's stupid," said Sarah, "just kind of... plastic."

I knew what she meant. Although Dave's mouth was always fixed in a grin, his eyes were cold and distant. He was like a bad actor playing the part of a pupil.

If I'd known what he really was, I'd have run out of the classroom, down the stairwell, out of the playground, and kept running until I was miles and miles away.