The Gecko and Sticky: Villains Lair
by Wendelin Van Draanen

Awesome Series Of Books...Can't Wait For The Next One Coming Out In Jan 2010

Dave Sanchez is an average boy with an after-school job and a pet gecko named Sticky. All very normal—until the day Sticky talks. Sticky tells Dave a wild tale of a former life of crime, searching for Aztec gold with a treasure hunter named Damien Black, and of a magical Aztec wristband with shiny gold power ingots that will give the wearer super powers. Dave doesn’t believe a word—until Sticky shows him the wristband. But while Sticky managed to escape with the wristband, Damien Black has the power ingots. So the lizard and treasure hunter each have something the other wants...very badly.

Filled with outrageous adventures, over-the-top characters, snappy-funny dialogue, and a tongue-planted-firmly-in-cheek narration, this new series is sure to be a hit with young superheros everywhere.

Wendelin Van Draanen spent many years as a teacher before devoting herself to writing full-time. She lives in Central California.

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My Personal Review:
Dave Sanchez is your typical 13-year-old boy living the normal life. He has normal parents, a normal bratty sister, a normal crush on the girl next door, and a normal routine of going to school and working as an errand-boy after school. There is, however, nothing normal about a talking gecko lizard who likes to steal things, a dastardly villain who holds an ancient power, or a mariachi band made up of brothers who aren't really brothers. Somehow normal Dave becomes mixed up in the middle of this abnormal group of
people, and he doesn't know quite what to do about it. But wait, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's start with Sticky, the talking Gecko lizard. In most instances, Gecko lizards can't talk --- or steal things --- but Sticky is quite real and has a real problem of taking things that don't belong to him. This time his sticky hands have landed an ancient Aztec wristband that promises incredible powers to the person wearing it. The wristband, though, doesn't work without power ingots: notched Aztec coins that click into the wristband. The person with these magical ingots is none other than the most evil and diabolical treasure hunter in the world --- Damien Black.

Damien Black, as you can imagine, is less than thrilled to discover that a lizard has stolen his most prized possession. He'll stop at nothing to retrieve the wristband that enables the wearer to fly, walk on walls, or become invisible, among other things. Since Black still has the power ingots, there is only one thing for Sticky to do: return to Black's monstrous mansion and get his sticky fingers on those amazing superpowers.

And that is where we find poor normal Dave. After recovering from the shock of a talking gecko lizard, Dave is entranced by the possibility of flying or becoming invisible and agrees to go with Sticky to Black's mansion. Their journey is filled with all sorts of vile and diabolical mischief you might expect from a scheming villain: trap doors, confusing hallways, a broken evil-laugh soundtrack, an unpleasant snail waterfall, and a very hungry komodo dragon. Along the way, Dave and Sticky come face to face with Black and his accomplices, the Bandito Brothers, and yet manage to escape with a power ingot in hand --- or, I should say, in wristband.

Dave, though, ends up disappointed with his ingot's magical power and believes everything will return to normal now that he's back at home and grounded for staying out so late. Black, on the other hand, will stop at nothing until he has the wristband and all the ingots back in his possession. When Black places another boy's life in danger, Sticky convinces Dave to use the magic power for good, and so begins the adventures of The Gecko & Sticky.

After reading this book, I found myself wishing that I had a hilarious sidekick like Sticky whispering in my ear and getting me into all sorts of trouble. I also couldn't help laughing at Damien Black's attempts to be really evil but usually failing miserably. Plus, the Bandito Brothers add a great comical element to the book. VILLAIN'S LAIR is the start to a great series for beginning or reluctant readers and anyone who longs to be a superhero.

--- Reviewed by Benjamin Boche

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