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opening extract from

Boy Zero Wannabe Hero: The Petrifying Plot of the Plummeting Pants

written by

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BOY ZERO

WANNABE HERO

THE
PETRIFYING
PLOT OF THE
PLUMMETING PANTS

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Illustrations by Steve May

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faber and faber

FOR GEOFFREY AND GEORGIA

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SUPERHERO OR SUPERZERO?

Charlie Applejack was sitting on his bed reading his favourite book of all time: *Commander Ron: My Life as an Extremely Cool Superhero and Other Stories To Make You Go Wow*. He was nose deep in the middle of Commander Ron's most thrilling adventure, 'The Day it Rained Killer Zombie Iguanas', when suddenly he heard his mother calling from downstairs in the lounge.

'Charlie, Charlie – the post has arrived.'

Charlie snapped Commander Ron's book shut and rocketed down the stairs.



‘I’ll get it!’

He hurtled through the front door and down the path to the box by the gate with his arms flapping like an out-of-control bumble bee. Dad waved at him furiously. ‘Charlie, watch out for the ...’

KERRUNCH

‘... post box!’

Charlie brushed the shattered remains of the box off his sweatshirt.

‘Oops. Sorry, Dad. I did it again. Sometimes I just don’t know my own strength.’

Dad picked up the pieces of broken wood off the grass.

‘Son, you gotta slow down. That’s the third box you’ve destroyed already this week. I don’t have any more left. Now, I know you’re really excited about the news you’re expecting from the Super School, but ...’

Charlie suddenly noticed a small white object wedged in the middle of a bed of petunias.

‘Dad, Dad, look it’s here.’ He reached down and picked up a mud-stained envelope. ‘It’s my letter



from the Super School.’

Dad held the letter up in the air.

‘So it is.’



Charlie, Mum, Dad, and Charlie’s sister Trixie sat around the kitchen table eagerly eyeing up the crumpled envelope. Trixie thrust out her hand and grabbed it.

‘Dad said I could open it first,’ she cried.

Dad plucked the envelope out of Trixie’s hands.

‘No, I didn’t.’ He passed it over to Charlie. ‘This is Charlie’s letter. He’s been expecting it all year.’

Charlie ran his finger along the top of the

envelope. He passed it over to Mum. 'I can't open it. I'm too nervous. You do it.'

'Are you sure, dear?'

'Yep.'

Mum carefully peeled open the seal and looked inside. 'It's a letter from Alfred Heath, the director of the Super School. Do you want me to read it out loud?'

Charlie nodded.

'Dear Master Applejack, thank you for your recent application to join our world-famous superhero training school. We were thrilled to receive your application, and we were also impressed with the positive attitude you displayed during your superpowers testing exams.'

Charlie beamed.

'However, after reviewing your test results, we feel that your superpowers are simply not super enough to meet the high standards of our school. Sadly, we cannot offer you a position on our superhero training programme. We wish you all the best for your future, and hope that you have a super day.'



Charlie's jaw dropped. Dad looked at Mum. Mum looked down at her hands. Trixie yawned and started picking her nose.

'What? They said my superpowers are not super enough? That's rubbish. I've got loads of superpowers. I'm overflowing with superpowers. The school must have made a terrible mistake. Maybe they got my application mixed up with somebody else's?'

Mum read a little further down the letter.

'No, Charlie, I don't think so. Look, they've

listed all of your superpowers test results. You failed their flying test. You failed their running test. And you failed their lifting test as well.

Charlie grabbed the letter.

‘Let me see . . . Oh, that’s not right . . . they’ve only listed the things that I’m not very good at. Look, there’s no mention of my coolest superpowers like my super somersaulting and my super juggling.’

Mum looked at Charlie.

‘Dear, I’m not sure that juggling rates very highly as a superpower these days.’

Charlie covered his eyes. ‘This is so unfair. All my life I’ve wanted to go to Super School. There’s nothing else that I ever wanted to do. How on earth will I ever get to be a superhero if I don’t have any training?’

Mum put her arm round Charlie.

‘You know what, maybe this is for the best. Being a superhero is a very, very dangerous job indeed. You have to work long hours. You get cold, you get wet, you get tired. And I’ve heard that those supervillains can be very rude sometimes.’

Perhaps it's time for you to start thinking about choosing a different career. Have you ever considered working in television? I'm sure that you'd make a super game-show host.'

Dad walked over.

'Son, I think what you're experiencing right now can be best described as an important life-learning lesson. In my number-one bestselling book *If You Can Change Your Socks, Then You Can Change the World* I write that a young man's journey through life is very much like taking a walk down a corridor and having to pass through a series of doors. Sometimes when you approach a door it opens for you, but sometimes it doesn't. Charlie, right now you're stuck in front of a door that has the words "Your New Future" written on the front of it. So you know what you have to do to get through that door, Charlie? You have to knock as loudly as you can. Keep knocking and knocking and knocking, until someone finally hears you and opens the door. And if that doesn't work, then try ringing the doorbell instead. Maybe that will get their attention. Do you understand

what I'm saying, Charlie? Do you get it?'

'Huh?' Charlie rolled his eyes, looking hopelessly confused.

Trixie glared at her mother.

'So, if Charlie's not going to Super School any more, does that mean that I can't have his room?'

Mum nodded. 'I'm sorry, darling.'

Trixie threw her arms up in disgust. 'Oh, this is the *worst* news ever.'



That night, Charlie with his super night vision shining brightly underneath his blanket, read another of Commander Ron's thrilling stories.

'You wait and see, Commander Ron. One day I'm going to be a superhero just like you. One day people will stop me in the street and say *WOW*. You'll see.'

Charlie closed his book and laid his head down on the pillow.

'And, if that never happens . . . then maybe one day I'll get to give away some really cool prizes on a game show.'