

## INTRODUCTION TO TANGERINE

Ugh, don't you just *hate* moving? It's bad enough getting used to a new town, finding your way around a new school, and trying to make new friends... but isn't it just the *worst* when a giant sinkhole opens up under your classroom and sucks down half the school buildings? So annoying!

And you know how when the field behind your new house gets struck by lightning, and that ignites a perpetually burning muck fire that fills your entire neighborhood with smoke, and then your homeowners' association tries to put it out by dumping a bunch of water on it, but that just turns it into a gigantic breeding ground for mosquitoes, which, it turns out, are carrying horrible diseases, so they have to fog your neighborhood with super poisonous pesticide? And, in spite of all that, the muck fire is *still* burning? Don't you just *hate* it when that happens?

Paul Fisher does. And that's not the half of what the poor guy has to deal with as the new kid in town, in Edward Bloor's 1997 book *Tangerine*.

*Tangerine* was Edward Bloor's very first novel, and not too shabby for a first try. It won tons of awards and has even been named to the American Library Association's 1998 Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults. It tackles some pretty weighty issues, too, like bullying and discrimination. So, yeah, it's going to be worth your time to read.

And if you're wondering why in the world a story about soccer, dysfunctional family life, and apocalyptic natural disasters is called *Tangerine*, just read on...

### What Is *Tangerine* About and Why Should I Care?

Okay, picture Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader locked in mortal combat, lightsabers swinging.

LUKE: "Ow! Hey, you cut my hand off!"

DARTH: "Luke, I am your father! Mua-ha-ha-ha!"

LUKE: "Nooooooooooooo!"

Now, substitute Paul Fisher in for Luke, and trade his big brother Erik in for Vader. That image gives you a pretty good summary of *Tangerine*.

Okay, not really. There aren't any lightsabers in Edward Bloor's *Tangerine*.

But we bet Erik Fisher was doing the same creepy heavy robot breathing as Darth Vader when he followed in his footsteps, and partially blinded his own little brother Paul—on purpose! But surely his parents came down on him like a ton of bricks when they found out, right?

Nope. They actually helped him cover it up and left poor little kindergarten-aged Paul so confused and upset about what had actually happened that he repressed the memory. Wow, that might even be worse than using the Force to choke people, you know?

In fact, let's take a quick look at all the ways in which Darth Vader would make a better brother than Erik Fisher.

### **Benefits of Having Darth Vader for a Brother Instead of Erik Fisher**

- Vader has a rocking cape and headgear. He *might* let you borrow them some time.
- You might also get away with stealing the keys to his Star Destroyer every once in a while.
- At least Vader would still care enough about you to want to team up as fellow dictators after he mutilated you.

So, in the end, does Erik think better of his choices, take off his futuristic mask, and expose his creepy, disfigured, bone-white head to the world so he could die a changed man? Well, no. And not just because he wasn't wearing a mask in the first place.

Erik continues to torment Paul, his friends, and anyone else who happens to cross his path until the police finally get involved. Then, and only then, do his parents actually seem to realize that they've been shortchanging Paul. If that's not a messed-up family, then we don't know what is.

The thing is, everyone's got some sort of family issues, even if they're not quite in the same league as Paul's. So, in spite of the more bizarre aspects—and the light sabers—you may actually have more in common with Paul—and Luke—than you think.