

# **BAD** Princesses

PERFECT VILLAINS

**JENNIFER TORRES**

 **SCHOLASTIC**

BOOK

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Scholastic Inc.

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For Soledad



# CHAPTER 1

It is a glittery-golden morning on the first day of school for royalty in training.

*Ghastly* golden, if you ask Princesa Dominga. She grimaces at the parade of princesses that jostle past her, jewel-toned traveling cloaks billowing over their shoulders as they hurry toward the grand arched entry to the palace.

Dominga tightens her own cloak around her

neck, as though she could make herself disappear behind its black velvet folds. Already, the Fine and Ancient Institute for the Royal is far worse than she ever could have predicted. She should have jumped from her mother's carriage the moment she realized where it was taking her.

She squints into the dazzling sun and wishes she were someplace dark. Someplace dank. Someplace *else*. She closes her eyes and imagines it. She can almost smell the mold and mildew. She can nearly hear the steady *drip drip drip* of sludge down a dungeon wall.

But as soon as she opens her eyes, the scene dissolves. Faster than a nightmare at daybreak.

There is no escape. The last carriages clatter away after late-arriving princesses have said their goodbyes, and the gates clang shut behind them. Dominga's mamá stayed only long enough leave

her with a warning: “If I hear any more of this villain nonsense, I’ll yank you back to the castle, where you’ll spend your days managing Paloma’s correspondence.” Princesa Paloma—more like *Princesa Perfecta*—is Dominga’s older sister. She graduated from the F.A.I.R. the year before and would one day be queen.

If there is anything more appalling than the F.A.I.R., it is the thought of being stuck at home, writing Paloma’s letters. Would she have to sign them with the same flourish of hearts and flowers that her sister did? Better to never find out.

Dominga supposes she is stuck. For now. She looks past the locked gate where, no more than a day’s walk away, the Bewitched Academy for the Dreadful is perched atop a grim and craggy cliff. Storm clouds as dark as shadows swirl around its spindly towers.

That is where I should be, Dominga thinks. That is where I belong.

Instead she is here, where blushing blossoms sail on a sweet silken breeze.

“Sickeningly sweet,” Dominga mutters, plopping herself down on her trunk to let the swarm of princesses surge ahead without her. A pale pink petal lands on her nose. She sneezes.

“¡Salud!” a voice sings out, even though Dominga is perfectly healthy. “And perhaps next time you can try to sneeze a bit more quietly. I’m *certain* you wouldn’t want to cause a commotion, not on the very first day.”

Dominga looks up. Standing next to her is a tall girl with coppery-red hair and a yellow gown so bright it almost glows. The girl dips into a deep curtsy. “I am Princesa Inés,” she says. “Encantada.”



Dominga could not be any less enchanted. She nods back anyway. “Dominga.”

“Dominga?” Inés echoes. She gapes at Dominga, from her scuffed black boots to her gold-rimmed glasses. The wrinkled-nose look on Inés’s face is a mixture of confusion and disappointment. Dominga has seen this look before.

“As in Princesa Paloma’s sister?”

Dominga nods again.

“Paloma was last year’s Fairest of the F.A.I.R., you know,” Inés continues.

Dominga knows. She could not unknow it if she tried.

A new look crosses Inés’s face. Her amber-brown eyes gleam. “In that case,” she says, pulling Dominga up by the elbow, “I am *certain* we are going to be friends. *Best* friends. Let’s find a spot near the front. No one will notice us all the way back here.”

Yes, *that is the point*, Dominga thinks. She steps back on her heels. “Thank you, but I would prefer to stay—” she protests.

“Nonsense.” Inés yanks even harder. Dominga has no choice but to follow, dragging her trunk behind her across the lush green lawn. She casts one last glance at the B.A.D. and its towers that now seem as far away as they’ve ever been.

Inés catches the look. “Ugh,” she says. “I know. Isn’t it absolutely *shocking* that we can see that horrid place from here? They should build a higher wall or plant taller trees so we don’t have to look at it. In the meantime, we’ll just pretend it isn’t there, won’t we?”

She tilts her chin so high in the air that Dominga wonders how she can tell where she’s walking.

“And don’t worry,” Inés continues. “I’m sure

you'll have time to change out of your—" She turns briefly and wrinkles her nose again. "Traveling clothes."

Dominga looks down at her gown. The top is black, with a spray of crow's feathers at each shoulder. (She collected them herself.) The skirt is midnight blue with silver bats embroidered along its edge.

By the time Dominga looks up again, she realizes that Inés has squeezed and shoved her way to the front of the crowd.

"We're here!" Inés squeals. "And right on time!" The palace doors creak open. Silence ripples across the courtyard. Princesas watch in awe as a short woman with a long, slender nose emerges. She wears a satin vest that shimmers green and lavender. She stands beneath the palace's gilt arches and straightens her neck.

Inés nudges Dominga with her shoulder. “Shh,” she shushes, even though Dominga hasn’t said anything. “It’s all starting. Can you even stand it?”

Dominga cannot.

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