
ZACH

KING

THE MAGICAL MIX-UP



PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk



First published in the United States of America by HarperCollins
Children's Books and in Great Britain by Puffin Books 2018

001

Text copyright © Zach King, 2018
Illustrations copyright © Beverly Arce, 2018

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted

Set in 11.64/20.88 pt Sabon by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed in Italy by LEGO SpA

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–32188–1

All correspondence to:
Puffin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS. . . .

CHAPTER 1

"Go!" Rachel shouted. "I can't hold him much longer!"

She rode the giant alligator like a wild horse that had to be broken. Jawzilla, an enormous, slimy, scaly, mean-faced gator, had been magically transported into the principal's office from the zoo by Zach



King's magic snapbacks—and it was about to get loose. Three other kids, including Zach, scrambled to keep away from the gator's snapping jaws.

Zach knew what he had to do. Rachel couldn't hold Jawzilla forever. He grabbed his magical snapbacks, which operated like portals from one cap to the other, and tricked the gator into jumping into one cap. Then, Zach spun around and flushed the other cap down the toilet in the principal's private bathroom. The gator vanished down the toilet, which gurgled briefly and then exploded spectacularly, spraying water all over the trashed office. . . .

"Those were the days." Aaron sighed as he watched the alligator video on his phone for what must have been the hundredth time. "Man, I wish you still had your magic."

"Tell me about it," Zach agreed as the two boys walked across the parking lot toward the front entrance of the mall. He yanked his distracted friend out of the way of an oncoming car. "It's like I'm right back where I started—nowhere."

It had actually been only a few weeks since Zach's

magic snapbacks had been wrecked, but he was already tired of being an ordinary kid. Zach came from a whole family of modern-day magicians. All the Kings had a unique object that enabled them to use magic—and Zach was all too aware that to save his friends, he might have flushed his magic powers away forever.

Or had he?

The clear glass doors of the mall entrance tempted Zach. Once, not too long ago, he had somehow passed through a similar door like a ghost. Maybe he could still pull off that trick, even without his snapbacks?

It was worth a try.

"Get your phone camera ready," he told Aaron, who was all about capturing cool stuff on video. "I'm going for it!"

"Again?"

Zach had been trying to restart his magic for weeks without success, but this time would be different . . . just because. Taking a deep breath, he backed up to get a running start, then sprinted straight toward the closed door. In his head, he imagined himself passing through the solid glass as though it wasn't there.

I can do this, he thought. *I* have *to do this*.

WHAM!

His face collided with the door. Instead of passing through it, he bounced off it, stumbling backward into Aaron, who yelped in protest. Puzzled shoppers stopped to stare at Zach, who felt like a total dork. His nose didn't feel too great either.

"Ouch," he said, clutching his bruised beak.

Aaron checked his phone. "I'm guessing that's not what you wanted me to film."

"Not exactly." Zach sighed and shook his head. "I was sure I could do it again."

"There's got to be a trick to it. We just need to work together to figure it out," Aaron offered helpfully as the friends entered the mall and made their way to the food court. Zach's nose was still smarting as they settled into a booth at a diner-style fast food place and treated themselves to milk shakes and a big plate of fries.

The mall diner was one of Zach and Aaron's favorite spots. The fries were crispy, the burgers were cheap, no one rushed them out, and there was always a buzz of activity around.

Hungry shoppers streamed past them as Aaron couldn't

resist playing the alligator video again. Zach noted that the video, their most popular ever, had just rolled past fifty thousand views. He wondered how many of those were just from his friend watching it again and again and again.

"Seriously, dude, we gotta do something," Aaron insisted, nervously tugging on the collar of his shirt, like he was trying to escape from it. "No magic means no more cool YouTube videos, which means we're going to start losing subscribers quick, which means we're going to be yesterday's news. We have to find a way to get you your mojo back."

Aaron's videos of Zach's magic tricks had helped them both become a little more popular at school and online, so Zach couldn't blame his friend for wanting to keep the videos coming after being picked on for years. As for Zach, he was still new to public school, having been homeschooled for most of his life, and the online magic tricks had made fitting in a whole lot easier. Neither of the boys was exactly part of the in crowd these days, like Tricia, or considered as cool as Rachel, but they weren't at the bottom of the food chain anymore either.

"Magical objects just don't grow on trees, you know," Zach said. "Well, except for my uncle Elvis's object. He has a magical leaf. Dude gets super nervous every fall. It's not easy to find one lost leaf if it's been swept up in a huge pile. . . ."

"I'm serious," Aaron continued. "We can't start coasting on reruns. We need new content to protect our brand."

"Our brand?"

"Sure." Aaron explained, "we're the magic trick guys. We gotta keep doing bigger and more eye-popping magic tricks or our audience will go somewhere else."

"If you say so," Zach said.

To be honest, Zach was less worried about their "brand" than about Rachel, whom he'd had a crush on ever since the minute he'd met her. And it was his magic videos that had first gotten her attention. Would she still like him if he couldn't do magic anymore?

He glanced down at the clock on his phone. Rachel was supposed to have joined them by now. Was he just being paranoid, or was she late more and more often lately?

"I don't know what to tell you, man," he said to Aaron. "The snapbacks are gone. My magic is gone.

We're going to have rely on your cat, Michael, being cute to get views."

"Michael is on hiatus."

"Hiatus? How can a cat be on hiatus?"

"Creative differences." Aaron glanced around, then lowered his voice. "Between you and me, Michael has become a bit of a diva. He won't even purr for the camera without a bonus tuna treat." He let out a weary sigh. "Actors."

"Well, then, we're toast. You only get one magical item," Zach told his friend. "That's just how it works."

"But what if it isn't?" Aaron called up another video on his phone. "Watch this one again."

The video, which Aaron had recorded just days after the alligator incident, showed Zach suffering a serious brain freeze after sucking down an ice-cream soda too fast. He smacked one side of his head and ice cubes tumbled out of his ear, clattering onto the table. "See—magic!" Aaron pointed at the screen. "And you did that without the snapbacks."

"Yeah, maybe," Zach said. "But I have no idea how."

"That's what we have to figure out." Aaron shoved

a metal mixing cup full of ice-cold chocolate shake toward Zach.

"Seriously?" Zach protested. "But I'm stuffed!"

"It's science, dude. We have to keep experimenting until we figure it out."

"It's not science. It's magic. And seriously?"

"Seriously," Aaron said. He called the waitress over and asked her to bring one of every flavor shake they had.

"No way," Zach protested. "More brain freeze isn't going to prove anything."

"Well, then, you tell me how we're going to get your magic back," Aaron said. "What else did you have with you right before your head turned into an ice-cube maker?"

Zach searched his memory. "A Popsicle, I think. And before that, some fries with ketchup."

"Ketchup, you say?" Aaron's eyes lit up. "Just like the first time, the day we met, with the snack machine!"

Zack knew exactly what Aaron was talking about. On his very first day at Horace Greeley, Zach had fallen into a cafeteria snack machine, passing like a ghost through the clear glass front of the machine, and it'd happened

right after being "ketchupped" by Tricia Stands and her mean-girl friends. He never had figured out how or why he'd pulled off that trick. Or why he'd never been able to duplicate it.

"What?" he asked. "You think the ketchup triggered the magic?"

"Why not?" Aaron said. "It seems like the common element both times you did magic without the snapbacks!"

Excited, Aaron reached across the table and grabbed the red plastic ketchup bottle.

"Wait! What are you—" Zach complained, but too late! Aaron pointed the bottle at Zach, squeezed hard, and squirted ketchup all over Zach's favorite hoodie.

"Is it working?" Aaron asked. "Do you feel anything?"

"Besides annoyed?" Zach tried to wipe off the ketchup with a napkin, but he just ended up smearing the bright-red goo all over the place. He looked like the victim in a slasher movie. The more he dabbed at it, the worse it got. "Have you lost your marbles?"

"Never mind that. Try the ice cube trick again," Aaron urged. "Let's see if the ketchup makes a difference!"



"I'm not hungry!"

"Just go with it."

"Okay, fine. Whatever."

Zach sucked down a big slurp of ice-cold ice cream shake as quickly as he could. The freeze went straight to his brain. He winced in pain.

Aaron held up his phone to record the results of the test. "Anything? Shake your head. Like you did last time."

Zach shook his head.

"Harder," Aaron urged.

He shook hard—but not a single ice cube tumbled out.

"Nothing." Zach shrugged. "Maybe I just had some leftover magic that one time."

"I don't know." Aaron looked reluctant to give up on his theory. He scratched his chin like a scientist pondering a difficult equation. "Perhaps we just need to find the right kind of ketchup . . . or maybe some mustard or mayonnaise?"

Zach groaned.

There *had* to be a better way to get his magic back!