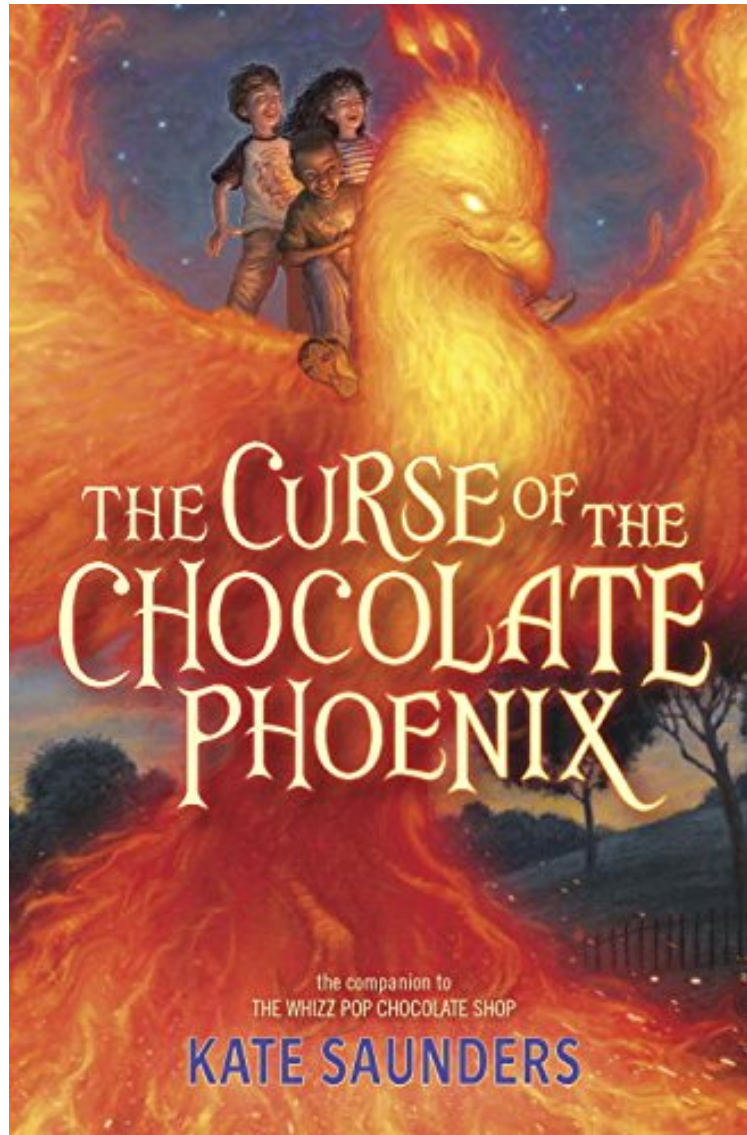


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The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix

Kate Saunders

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Kate Saunders : The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix:

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For fans of Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Oz and Lily's magical chocolate-filled adventure continues in the sequel to The Whizz Pop Chocolate Shop. In the wrong hands, chocolate can be very dangerous indeed. . . . Oz and Lily have a top-secret mission. Alba the witch has gotten her hands on a magical chocolate phoenix and is plotting to use it for some serious evil. With the help of an army of rats and an unreliable talking cat, the children must pursue her not only across London but through time itself. This might be their toughest adventure yet. Praise for The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix "Saunders weaves the supernatural with the ordinary with ease. Readers who enjoyed The Whizz Pop Chocolate Shop will not be disappointed."—Booklist "Clearly, Saunders has honed her deft and breezy comic style while affectionately channeling mild echoes of Harry Potter and The Hobbit...It's official: more magical chocolate equals even more perceptive and magical fun for all."—Kirkus Reviews "Saunders's imagination is out in full force. Hand this to readers who love adventure, fantasy, and Mission Impossible-type adventure."—SLJ

Praise for Kate Saunders Praise for The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix "Saunders weaves the supernatural with the ordinary with ease. Readers who enjoyed The Whizz Pop Chocolate Shop will not be disappointed."—Booklist "Clearly, Saunders has honed her deft and breezy comic style while affectionately channeling mild echoes of Harry Potter and The Hobbit."—Kirkus s "Saunders's imagination is out in full force. Hand this to readers who love adventure, fantasy, and Mission Impossible-type adventure."—SLJ The Whizz Pop Chocolate Shop "This story has adventure, excitement, humor and magic, and will appeal to boys and girls alike."—SLJ "Reminiscent of Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory."—Booklist "A quick pace and intricate plot twists keep excitement high . . . [in] this enjoyable and moving romp through a magical London underworld."—Publishers Weekly Five Children on the Western Front Winner of the Costas Award for Children's Fiction ? "An irresistible read."—Publishers Weekly, Starred "Saunders strikes a surprisingly successful balance between the mischievous magic of the sand fairy and the harsh realities of wartime England." —The Bulletin "A dramatic, heartrending look at World War I's far-reaching consequences for families and individuals."—SLJ Magicalamity ? "[Children] will love this action-packed adventure, brimming with sly humor and clever asides....This book should fly off the shelves, with or without a magic carpet."—SLJ, Starred "A quick, magical romp."—The Bulletin "Saunders weaves a tight tale with a satisfying conclusion."—Booklist Beswitched A Junior Library Guild Selection ? "This absorbing novel...features a dimensional, delightful protagonist, whose personality and growth ring true....Along with the entertaining magical elements, the universal themes of self-discovery, and looking beyond appearances combine into a wholly engaging and enjoyable read."—Booklist, Starred "Saunders offers a coming-of-age tale against the rich backdrop of full period detail . . . [It] will charm readers."—Publishers Weekly "A ripping English boarding-school story with a perceptive heroine and time-travel twist guaranteed to appeal to modern schoolgirls."—Kirkus s About the Author KATE SAUNDERS has written lots of books for adults and children. These include Beswitched, Magicalamity, The Whizz Pop Chocolate Shop and Five Children on the Western Front. She lives in London. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. I Nicked It began as a perfectly normal Saturday morning. Bruce and Emily Spoffard sat in the kitchen reading the papers, while baby Daisy slept in her basket. Their eleven-year-old son, Oz (short for Oscar), was upstairs playing with the big Scalectrix track on his bedroom floor with his best friend, Caydon, who lived across the road. Oz's twin sister, Lily, was in the next bedroom, sorting out her collection of makeup. Or so they thought. But nothing at 18 Skittle Street was ever quite normal, and the Spoffard parents had no idea what was really going on. In Oz's bedroom a dirty, whiskery gray rat was riding on top of one of the racing cars. In Lily's bedroom, their daughter was carefully painting the claws of Demerara, a cat they had never seen. And baby Daisy was only sleeping so soundly because the yellow roses on Lily's wallpaper were singing the theme from Star Wars--Bruce and Emily Spoffard were deaf to the high, sweet, silvery voices that filled the shabby old house from top to bottom. When Bruce Spoffard inherited the chocolate workshop in the busy London district of Holloway, he had known that his ancestors were famous chocolate-makers. But he had totally missed the glaring fact that they were also magic. Though he had been born into a long line of witches, all the family magic had passed him by and jumped straight into his three children. Bruce didn't have a magical bone in his body, and his wife, Emily, was just the same; incredible events could unfold right under their noses, and they never saw or heard a thing. "I wish those roses would shut up," Demerara mewed crossly. "They're giving me one of my headaches." "Daisy loves their singing," Lily said. "Sit still--I don't want blobs of purple nail polish all over my duvet." "Oh, all right. But you'd better hurry up, dear. Those curlers will be heated by now, and I want you to put a couple of small ones in my cheek-fur." Unlike every other cat in the world, Demerara could talk. She was also immortal, and had lived at the old chocolate workshop since the 1930s. She was a stout, glossy, beautiful animal, with golden-brown fur (her original owner had named her after demerara sugar) and square green eyes. Her voice was a weird, shivery, high mewing, with occasional snuffles and yowls. Around her furry neck she wore a gold bell, hanging on a collar of purple velvet. "And

when you've finished my fur, we should do something amusing with your hair." "No, thanks," Lily said. "My hair's amusing enough already." Lily's hair was dark and wild and curly--her mum said it had a life of its own. She would have loved it to be smoother and more normal, but the cat's ideas for it were usually ridiculous. "You could plait it into the shape of the Eiffel Tower," Demerara suggested. "That would look stylish. Did I ever tell you about my trip to Paris in 1934?" The wallpaper choir suddenly started singing the cancan, and Lily giggled so much that she had to stop painting Demerara's claws. The plump little cat was offended. "Lily, I insist that you do something about your GHASTLY wallpaper!" "It's not ghastly," Lily said. "Those roses are really sweet these days." When she had first moved into this bedroom a few months ago, the roses had looked like mean faces and whispered spiteful things. They had now become kind and their yellow petals were smiling--but they still enjoyed teasing the bossy talking cat. "This is the sort of thing that happens when there's too much magic in the house," Demerara snapped. "It soaks into the walls. If I were you, I'd scrape that paper right off and replace it with some nice pink paint." A loud thump came from Oz's bedroom next door, followed by yells of laughter. "Good gracious, what are those boys doing in there?" Demerara hissed. "I suppose that vulgar rat is telling rude jokes again--Lily, do my cheeks, then go and tell them to be quiet." "OK." Lily loved Demerara, but it was sometimes nice to get away from her; this morning she could not stop mewing out orders. While the nail polish was drying, Lily tackled the fiddly job of putting curlers into Demerara's face fur. "That should give me some lovely volume," said Demerara, squinting at herself in the mirror. "Now do go and tell them to stop shouting. Will nobody consider my nerves?" Lily left the immortal talking cat on the bed (looking very funny with her painted claws resting on a pillow and two curlers in each cheek) and went into Oz's room to see what the noise was about. Oz and Caydon were sprawled across the floor in fits of laughter. A red car was zipping round the Scalextric track, and the dirty gray rat was running along beside it. "Come on, Spike!" Oz cried. "The car's winning!" Spike the rat--the other talking animal at Number 18--flopped down on the carpet, puffing hard. "Whew, I'm all out of breath!" "Out of shape, more like." Caydon gave the rat's stomach a friendly prod with his finger. "You should join a gym." "Rats don't have gyms," Oz said. "Maybe we should build him one." "Morning, Lily-girl," said Spike. "I suppose Demerara thinks we're making too much noise. The old boiler's in a right mood today." Lily knelt down on the floor to pat the rat's greasy little head with her finger. She didn't really like rats, but had gotten very fond of easygoing Spike. "Don't take any notice--she's only in a mood because she wants to wear lipstick but can't. Cats don't have lips, so it just clogs her fur." "She's always in a mood," Oz said, grinning. He was Lily's twin. The two of them could read each other's minds, but they didn't look alike. Instead of Lily's wild black hair and dark brown eyes, Oz had straight, light brown hair and his eyes were greenish blue. "We're only having a bit of fun with Spike." Spike was also immortal--Oz and Lily's ancestors had used the cat and rat in their experiments. "No harm in that," Spike said, in his rough, squeaky voice. "With you lot at school all day, it's been too quiet round here." And at that exact moment, the quiet of Skittle Street was ripped apart by the deafening yatter-yatter-yatter of a helicopter, swooping right down over the roof of Number 18. The three children rushed to the window in time to see two large black vans pull up outside the house. Suddenly the street was milling with dozens of armed police. Black helmets covered their faces. They wore bulky flak jackets, and their machine guns gleamed in the October sunlight. "Blimey--talk about speaking too soon!" Spike gasped, jumping on Oz's head to get a better view. "What's going on?" "Maybe someone on this street is a criminal," Oz said. "Or maybe it's a gang of super-criminals," Caydon suggested. "Hey--look!" Two armed policemen had appeared on the roof of the flats opposite. There was a tremendous thumping on the front door downstairs that made the whole house shake, and a man's voice shouted, "POLICE! OPEN UP!" "But we're not in a gang or criminals!" Lily clutched at Oz. "Why're they coming here?" The three of them hurtled out of the room and down the stairs. Bruce Spoffard was walking calmly across the hall to open the door. He was a tall man, with curly black hair and dark eyes, like Lily. "POLICE!" "Dad?" Lily clung to the banister at the bottom of the stairs. "What's going on?" "Oh, it's probably nothing," Dad said. A moment later he was lying facedown in the hall with his arms spread out, a policeman's foot on his back and a machine gun pointing at his head. "Dad!" Lily shrieked. "Hello, Officer," Dad said, as politely as he could with carpet in his mouth. "Do come in and have a look round--would you like a cup of tea?" He was acting as if being hurled to the floor by armed police was quite normal. More armed police--more than Lily could count--charged into the house. Four of them nearly knocked her over as they rushed upstairs, and a moment later she heard the tinny screams of the wallpaper roses in her bedroom. What were they doing up there? The policeman with his foot on Dad's back held something out to the three children--a small white card, marked with a fingerprint and a bar code. Oz was the first to get his breath back. "He's from the SMU--that's why Dad is being so calm. This is magic business!" SMU stood for Secret Ministry of the Unexplained, the unofficial government department that handled anything mysterious that might be a threat to national security. Oz, Lily and Caydon had been recruited by the SMU last summer holidays, when the government had needed their special powers. "Wicked!" Caydon's brown, dimpled, innocent--looking face broke into a beaming smile. "I knew they'd need us again! I knew it! We might get time off school!" "No!" wailed Lily. "I hate the SMU!" Last summer's work had been extremely scary and dangerous. Oz and baby Daisy had almost died, and Lily still had nightmares about some of the dreadful things they had seen. "Sorry, Lily," a woman's voice said. "This is an -emergency." Another armed police officer had come into the hall. She took off her black helmet, and Oz cried, "Hey--it's Rosie! Stop moaning, Lily--it's Rosie from the

bomb squad!" The three children knew her from their adventures last summer. "Shut up," Lily said, "I'm not moaning." But she stopped crying. It was a relief to see Rosie's familiar face, though the pretty young woman looked more serious than usual. She bent down towards Dad, still facedown on the carpet. "Sorry about all this, Mr. Spoffard." "Quite all right, Officer," Dad mumbled. "He'll be fine. Please don't worry about him or your mum," said Rosie. "We've sprayed the street with our special oblivion gas--no non-magic people will notice anything strange, and their memories will be wiped clean and replaced." "But look, what is all this?" Oz asked. "What's the bomb squad doing here?" "I'm not in the bomb squad anymore," Rosie said. "I've been moved to the SMU special commando unit. We're attached to the SAS, and we're here to make a dangerous arrest." "What--here?" "There's been a major breach in security." "But--this has to be a mistake," Oz said. "We don't have any dangerous people in this house!" Two armed policemen thundered down the stairs. "No sign of her," one of them told Rosie. "She's nowhere in the house and she's not on the roof." Rosie looked at Lily. "We've come for the cat. You'd better tell us where she is." "Cat in Hot Water" "What?" Oz choked out. "You've come to arrest Demerara?" "She hasn't done anything bad--she's just a cat!" Horrified, Lily grabbed Rosie's arm. "What're you going to do to her? Why do you need those huge guns?" Rosie gently shook off her hand. "I'm really sorry. This is how we respond to any Grade One Alert--we've got our orders. Of course we won't hurt her." "Grade One Alert?" Caydon was bewildered. "But Demerara can't be a threat to national security--all she cares about is food and makeup!" Rosie said, "Look, I don't like it either. But it really would be easier if you'd just tell us where she is." Lily's heart skipped, and she felt that Oz was thinking the same thing--Demerara must be hiding in the magical secret safe in the old workshop; her owner had made it in the 1930s and it was invisible. They'll never find it, thought Lily. But her heart sank again a moment later, when Rosie said, "She'll be in the secret safe." One of the officers held up Spike, who wriggled furiously in his big, black-gloved hand. "Shall we ask the talking rat where it is?" "You'll be wasting your time!" squeaked Spike. "I'll never tell you. You leave the poor old girl alone!" "Never mind the rat," Rosie said. "These prewar cloaking spells are pretty easy to crack nowadays. Get the sensor and the revelation spray." Lily started crying again. It was dreadful to think of her foolish little cat being flung into some high-security prison with no access to beauty products. "Stand back, guys," Rosie said kindly. "This could get explosive." The officer dropped Spike on the floor and went outside to the vans. He returned a few minutes later with a large aerosol can, and something that looked like a very small silver laptop; small enough to sit in the palm of Rosie's hand. She opened it and immediately it let out a deep electronic growling sound. "In there." She pointed to the door of the old workshop. The old chocolate workshop, where the Spoffard ancestors had made their magic chocolate, took up most of the ground floor of 18 Skittle Street. Dad planned to make it into an office one day, but for now it was still in a state of perfect preservation, just as it had been in the 1930s. The walls and ceiling were hung with molds and tools of gleaming copper and silver. There was a deep fireplace, and, in one corner, a large metal -cylinder--shaped device, invented by the Spoffards to shake the cacao bean nibs from their husks. When Rosie held the sensor near the cylinder, it let out such a deep, violent growl that she nearly dropped it. "Ow! She's here--give me the spray." Lily, Oz and Caydon crowded into the doorway. Lily clutched Oz's hand; Rosie had found the secret safe that Demerara called her "flat." The metal cylinder was shoved aside. Rosie shook the can and sprayed it over the blank white wall. She pressed a button on the sensor. "Here we go!" A loud bang made the house lurch under their feet, and suddenly there was black smoke and an intense smell of burning plastic. When the smoke cleared, the wall had melted away to reveal a stout golden cat, her cheeks in curlers, sitting in a cave filled with rubbish. "How DARE you!" Demerara screamed. "How DARE you storm into a lady's private boudoir! Close that hole AT ONCE!" "You're under arrest," Rosie said. "You have the right to remain silent--in fact, we'd prefer it." "Arrest ME? What on earth for? I haven't done anything! I'm an innocent cat! What's more, I'm a government agent and I DEMAND to see the man known as J!" "Come with us calmly and quietly," Rosie said, "and if you haven't done anything, you'll be fine." She took a step towards Demerara. The cat arched her back and bared her teeth. "What am I charged with?"