

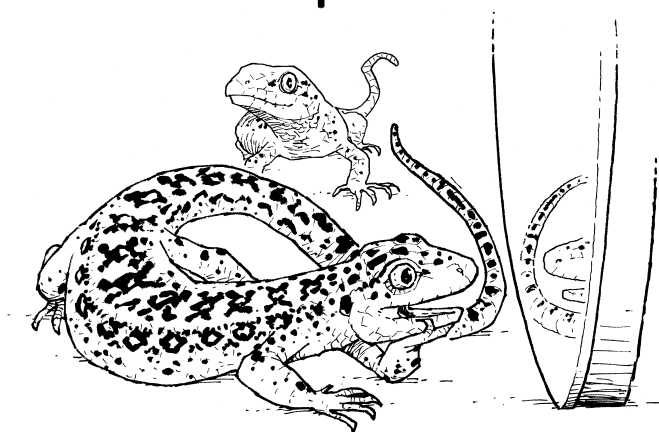


SWITCH

Lizard Loopy

The title 'SWITCH' is rendered in large, bold, black letters. A silhouette of a person stands inside the letter 'I'. Various lizard silhouettes are integrated with the letters: one on top of 'S', one on top of 'W', one on top of 'T', one on top of 'C', and one on top of 'H'. Below the letters, a large lizard silhouette is positioned as if it is crawling through the word.

Ali Sparkes



illustrated by
Ross Collins

OXFORD
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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
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Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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First published 2012

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-2732361

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain

Paper used in the production of this book is a natural,
recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable forests.
The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

Photograph on page 127: Thanks to Tiny Drury, cool chameleon.

Danny and Josh and Petty

Josh and Danny might be twins but they're NOT the same. Josh loves getting his hands dirty and learning about nature. Danny thinks Josh is a nerd. Skateboarding and climbing are way cooler! And their next-door neighbour, Petty, is only interested in one thing ... her top secret SWITCH potion.



Danny

- FULL NAME: Danny Phillips
- AGE: 8 years
- HEIGHT: Taller than Josh
- FAVOURITE THING: Skateboarding
- WORST THING: Creepy-crawlies and tidying
- AMBITION: To be a stunt man





Josh

- FULL NAME: Josh Phillips
- AGE: 8 years
- HEIGHT: Taller than Danny
- FAVOURITE THING: Collecting insects
- WORST THING: Skateboarding
- AMBITION: To be an entomologist



Petty

- FULL NAME: Petty Hortense Potts
- AGE: None of your business
- HEIGHT: Head and shoulders above every other scientist
- FAVOURITE THING: SWITCHING Josh & Danny
- WORST THING: Evil ex-friend Victor Crouch
- AMBITION: Adoration and recognition as the world's (and for the government to say sorry!)



See ya Later

'ALLIGATOR!'

The scream echoed across the hall, filled with blood-chilling terror. Claudia Petherwaite's eyes were glassy with horror and her pink mouth was stretched wide as the scream poured out of it.

The alligator swung its snout round and located Claudia's scent. It grinned at her, taking a step closer, its dim swamp-green eyes fixing on the movement as she staggered backwards towards the foldaway climbing bars. Her lunchbox fell to the floor, scattering sticks of celery and carrot across the scuffed wooden surface.

The alligator was not distracted. It smelt meat. Not veg.



‘NO! NO! NO!!!’ screamed Claudia Petherwaite, trying to scramble up the bars but failing because her shiny shoes were too slippery and her hands were slidey with fearful sweat.

The alligator laughed—at least it looked that way. Its snaggle-toothed snout lifted and its huge mouth opened wide, getting ready to snap down on a limb.

‘Shouldn’t we help her?’ screamed another girl, cowering by the stack of gym mats. ‘She’s going to be eaten alive!’

‘It’s awful,’ sobbed another, just behind her. ‘But she was so mean to Danny in Biology this morning. Maybe it’s a bit harsh . . . but I—I suppose if *anyone* had to get eaten alive by an alligator . . .’

The alligator’s mouth got wider still. Rows of vicious pointed teeth gleamed in the midday sun that shafted through the tall hall windows. Its stubby clawed feet dug into the wooden floor as it raised its scaly head on a thick, muscular neck. It roared and belched and the stink of a recently dismembered gazelle wafted up towards Claudia

who was now babbling wildly, swinging on a gym rope just inches away from the ravening reptile's gaping jaws.

'I know—I know I was horrible to Danny,' she shrieked. 'And it was so wrong of me to say he was stupid because he couldn't spell "chrysalis". I should never have laughed at him. And now, as I'm about to be eaten alive, I just wish I could say sorry to him first . . . and tell him that he's actually very clever and handsome and fabulous in e-every wa-a-ay . . . ayayaaaargh MY LEEEEEEEG!'



‘And then I bite her leg off,’ Danny said. He made a cracking and squelching noise and followed it with a gurgling scream. He rested his elbows on the gatepost and smiled happily.

‘You need help,’ Josh said. ‘Professional, mental help.’

‘What—just because I want to SWITCH into an alligator and bite Claudia Petherwaite’s leg off?’ Danny shrugged at his twin. ‘Oh come on! She’s *asking* to have her leg bitten off. I bet you half the kids in school would agree with me. There was never a girl so obviously in need of losing a leg to a killer reptile. It would probably make her a much nicer person. SO—come on! Let’s GO! I WANT TO BE AN ALLIGATOR!’

Josh just folded his arms and stared at him—so Danny jumped up and down and squeaked like an over-excited toddler. ‘Come ON! I WANT TO BE—’

Josh thwacked him on the back of the head with his hand.

‘Get a grip,’ Josh said. ‘You’re eight, not three!’

‘But I want to be an alligator,’ whined Danny. ‘NOOOOOOOW!’

‘You’ve had too many E numbers again,’ Josh said. ‘I’m taking you home.’ He grabbed his twin brother by the arm and yanked him up the path, away from their neighbour’s scruffy old red brick house. Away from any chance of Danny becoming an alligator.

‘You can just pretend for now, like you do in those embarrassing dragony questy role play games with Scott and Zac,’ went on Josh, shoving Danny ahead of him down the side passage to the back garden. His twin was still so over-excited he was bouncing off the brick walls.

‘They’re not embarrassing. They’re a laugh,’ chirruped Danny. ‘And last week I was the High Lord of Rifflescape and they were Elven Frogsprites—and I melted their heads.’

Josh sighed and shook his head. ‘You’re beyond help,’ he said. ‘There’s no way you’ll ever be safe as an alligator.’

Back in their garden, Josh shoved Danny down by the climbing frame and called to Piddle, their dog. As Piddle (named after a habit he had when stressed) trotted over, Josh picked him up, plonked

his small furry black and white body into Danny's excitable lap and said, 'SIT!'

'Both of you!' he added, as Danny and Piddle tried to spring up again. They both sat and one of them let his tongue hang out sideways.



'I'm serious, Danny!' Josh went on. He gazed across the top of the fence towards Petty Potts's back garden. Deep within its overgrown weeds and brambles stood a small, ordinary looking wooden shed. And deep within the shed stood a small, ordinary looking door. And beyond the door nothing was ordinary ever again.

'Let me just remind you of a few things,' Josh said, trying to sound like their dad. 'Only a few weeks ago we were shivering in terror about that

place.’ He jabbed his finger across the far side of the fence. ‘Since then we’ve been nearly eaten too many times to remember! And weren’t YOU the one who once said we would NEVER go back there again? Not EVER!’

‘Yeah, well,’ Danny said, playing with Piddle’s floppy ears and looking just a little bit less excitable. ‘That was to start with. I was freaked out. I mean, it’s not every day your grumpy old next-door neighbour suddenly turns out to be a genius scientist and changes you into a spider.’

Josh clambered up the climbing frame and perched on the top two bars. He stared at the roof of the ordinary shed and bit his lip. The truth was, he was very nearly as excited as Danny this time. He couldn’t *wait* to try out Petty Potts’s brand new SWITCH spray. REPTOSWITCH! Even the name was exciting. And what it stood for. Reptile . . . Serum Which Instigates Total Cellular Hijack. He would LOVE to be a reptile for half an hour . . . BUT . . .

Josh shook his head and took a deep breath. ‘Danny—let’s just do a checklist about how the

other SWITCHings have worked out, shall we?’ He counted across his fingers. ‘ONE. Spider SWITCH. Nearly squished by Jenny’s sandal, washed down the plughole, me nearly swallowed by a toad. TWO. Housefly SWITCH. Both of us nearly swatted into bluebottle jam, you wrapped up in a spider’s web, me trapped in a giant bogey—’

‘Yeah, yeah, I know,’ sighed Danny. And he did know. He was usually, in fact, the most likely of the two of them to say no to any dealings with Petty Potts. For a start, while Freaky Little Bug Boffin Josh loved them, Danny HATED all kinds of creepy-crawlies. He had been terrified of his own legs the whole time he was a spider. But . . . BUT . . . now that Petty had the full secret formula to make REPTOSWITCH, things were different.

There weren’t nearly as many predators after reptiles, were there? They were higher up the food chain!

‘THREE!’ Josh went on. ‘Grasshopper SWITCH. Nearly splatted by maths book, nearly chewed up by a cat . . . FOUR! Ant SWITCH. Turned into zombie Ant Queen-serving machines and nearly

burnt alive. FIVE! Crane Fly SWITCH. Almost eaten by Piddle! Nearly hoovered to death . . . do I need to go on?’

Danny shrugged. ‘No. You don’t. Being creepy-crawlies was ninety-five per cent pure terror! Although the grasshopper jumping was pretty cool . . . and the housefly aerobatics . . . ’

‘And the great diving beetle bit . . . ’ Josh couldn’t help smiling as he remembered. ‘Being able to swim under water *and* fly!’

‘Being a frog at summer camp was cool too . . . apart from you,’ Danny stared into Piddle’s innocent fluffy face and narrowed his blue eyes accusingly.

‘ . . . trying to bite my legs off!’

Piddle whined guiltily.

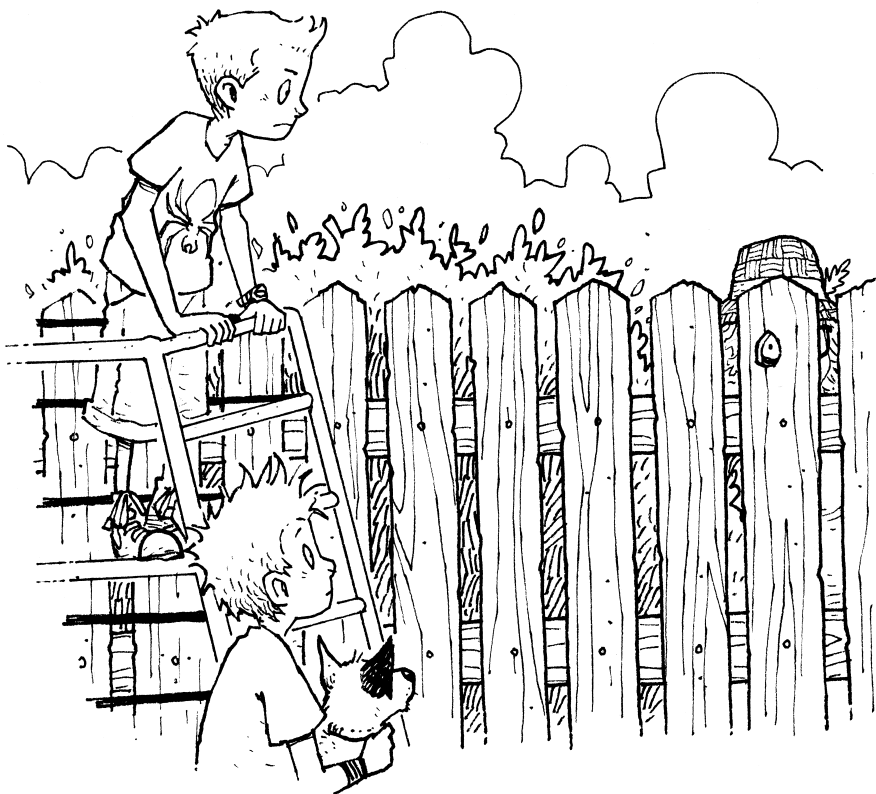
‘Point made!’ Josh said.

‘But don’t you see? Yes—the main problem with being SWITCHed is the nearly getting eaten!’ Danny said. ‘But *nothing* eats an alligator, does it? NOTHING!’

‘You’re right,’ came a voice from the other side of the fence. They both jumped and Josh could

see the top of Petty Potts's tweedy old hat while Danny could make out one of her eyes behind its thick glass spectacle lens, peering through a knot hole in the wood. 'NOTHING eats an alligator,' went on Petty. 'Don't you two think it's time you came back to my lab? REPTOSWITCH is waiting.'

There was a long silence in the garden, broken only by a soft whimper from Piddle. He was scared of Petty. With good reason. He got up and ran back into the house.



‘Come on,’ went on Petty. ‘We’re all in this together now. You are part of the SWITCH project. If you hadn’t found all my missing REPTOSWITCH cubes with the secret code in them, I would never have got past insects, beetles, and arachnids. We’ve already done amphibians—and now REPTOSWITCH is perfected! It’s what you’ve been waiting for all summer! It’s finished. It works! It’s time to have your reward and try it out!’

Still Josh and Danny said nothing. Petty Potts was amazing. But dangerous. She really couldn’t be trusted.

‘Very well,’ sighed Petty. ‘I wouldn’t dream of *making* you try it. Let’s just forget it. I’ll go back to my lab.’ Her voice took on a tragic tone. ‘And go on with the SWITCH project alone. Don’t you worry your little heads about me ever again. Maybe I’ll see you at the post office some days . . . Goodbye.’ Petty waded across her garden, waist deep in weeds, and went into her shed. Through the door at the back. Down the secret passageway. And into her underground lab.

Danny joined Josh on the top of the climbing frame and for a long time they stared across the fence. Danny ran his fingers through his messy blond hair and frowned. 'We *want* to be alligators!' he whimpered. 'Why aren't we jumping over the fence?'

'Because,' Josh said, scratching his own much shorter, neater blond hair. 'Whenever Petty asks us into her lab it's like a spider inviting us into its web.'

'So. We don't go,' Danny said, a few seconds later. 'We just . . . forget about it all.'

'That would be the sensible thing,' Josh said. They stared over the fence some more.

'Let's go then,' Danny said.

They were in Petty's lab fifty-seven seconds later.



