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The adventures of Vova Doover

«Автор»
2026

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The adventures of Vova Doover / А. В. Лукашев — «Автор», 2026

This book tells the story of the adventures of a schoolboy named Vova Doover and his friends—a cat and a vacuum cleaner—who together will collect shards across various eras and fight the Dark Mage.

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THE ADVENTURES OF VOVA DOOVER
by Artem Lukashev

Chapter 1. The Shard

Snow fell in big, lazy flakes, like feathers spilling from a torn pillow. It wasn't really cold; it only tickled Vova's face before melting into warm, salty drops. He had been swallowing tears for three whole blocks. His backpack felt especially heavy that day. It wasn't just the weight of his textbooks pressing on his shoulders—it was the weight of shame and frustration. Five failing grades! Even for Vova Doover, that was a lot.

But one of those grades burned inside him like a red-hot coin. Music. He had been standing at the front of the classroom, trying to squeeze out a hoarse rendition of "A Birch Tree Stood in the Meadow," when a sharp pain, like a needle jab, suddenly shot through his leg. He yelped so loudly that he hit notes their choir soloist couldn't reach. The whole class burst out laughing. The troublemaker, Semyon, returned to his seat wearing an innocent expression. Their teacher, Elena Arkadyevna, wrote a big, fat F in the grade book, her face cold with disappointment. "Doover, your antics have gone too far." That was that. There was no point explaining. His report card now held not merely a bad grade, but a glaring injustice that made his throat tighten.

He trudged along with his eyes fixed on the grey pavement patched with snow, noticing absolutely nothing around him—not even the ginger cat that had been following him for three blocks, padding silently through the drifts. The cat was unusually large, its fur gleaming copper in the dull winter light. Its green, slanted eyes studied the boy with an almost scientific attention that no ordinary cat could manage. The air around Vova felt thick and charged, like the moment before a thunderstorm you can see but cannot hear.

At the landing, Vova stopped in front of his door. He held his breath, let it out, took a deep breath in, and told himself, "All right, Vova. Keep it together." He gathered his thoughts, opened the door, and stepped inside. Mum was waiting in the hallway. He greeted her as if nothing had happened —as if those failing grades didn't exist—and went straight to his room.

Suddenly, someone knocked at the apartment door. Vova remembered that the headmistress had promised to come over and tell his mum everything. His heart began pounding all over again. The front door swung open. Vova stood by his bedroom door, pressing himself against it as hard as he could so he could hear the conversation. He caught only one word: something about a shard. "What shard?" he wondered.

Then his bedroom door flew open, and something shot past his feet so quickly that he couldn't make out what it was. He only saw it dart under his bed. He immediately decided he had to find out what it was and crawled after it, but he couldn't see a thing. He wriggled back out and looked around for his flashlight. It was nowhere to be found. "Mum! Have you seen my torch?" he called. "No!" she shouted back.

After an exhausting search, Vova decided to sit on his bed and take a break. The moment he sat down, he felt something uncomfortable underneath him. He stood up to move it. It was his flashlight. He was so delighted that he yelled, "YES!" Then he crawled under the bed again. On the way, he found his other sock—the one that had gone missing that morning—and, even stranger, a door he had never noticed before. Perhaps he had simply never paid attention. Or perhaps he had never crawled under his bed before. Either way, it didn't matter. He turned the handle, and the door opened onto a room he had never seen in his life.

Curious, he went down—or rather, flew down—the stairs. He tripped on the very first step and practically counted every single one with his teeth. At the bottom, he saw a cat carefully polishing a vacuum cleaner with its paw. "What on earth is going on down here?" Vova asked nervously.

The cat stopped polishing and settled onto a velvet cushion that seemed to have come from somewhere deep inside the room. It curled up, but its eyes, full of distant stars, stayed wide open. Its story unfolded slowly, wrapping around Vova like a warm blanket.

“Long ago, when the Sahara was still a green valley and the Nile knew the names of all the gods, my father ruled a mighty empire from a golden throne in Thebes. I was his only son and heir to the throne. My name was… but that name no longer matters. Time has rubbed it away, just as it rubbed away my human body.”

The cat paused. Vova thought he saw a glimmer of moisture in the corners of its green eyes.

“My father had an adviser named Ra-Hotep. A man with a sharp mind and a heart as cold as water at the bottom of a well. My father trusted him like a brother he had never had. One day, during a feast celebrating the flooding of the Nile, Ra-Hotep offered my father a goblet of wine, sweet as dates. ‘May the gods grant you a thousand more floods like this, my lord.’ My father drank—and began to cough. At first softly, then harder and harder. His fingers dug into the arms of his throne. I rushed to him, but Ra-Hotep flung me aside like a puppy. His usually respectful face twisted with triumphant hatred. He leaned towards my father’s ear and hissed so quietly that only I could hear: ‘The royal bloodline must end. The prophecy does not lie.’ He killed him deliberately, Vova. Calmly and decisively. I saw it in his eyes—not a fanatic’s rage, but the cool certainty of an architect tearing down an old building.”

The room fell silent. Even the vacuum cleaner stopped humming to listen.

“He wasn’t satisfied with killing my father,” the cat continued. “He wanted to get rid of me, too. But killing a small, helpless child was too cruel even for him, so he decided to turn me into a cat using a ritual. He dressed me in a cat costume, scattered strange shards around me, and began chanting: ‘Medio svantse elyumus.’ Suddenly, guards burst in and interrupted the ritual. A portal appeared out of nowhere and swept me away, scattering the shards across different eras and ages. I managed to grab one. Meanwhile, Ra-Hotep turned the guards into shadows and jumped through the portal after me, pulling his hood over his head. Then the portal snapped shut. And that is how I ended up in your time.”

The cat lifted its head and looked straight at Vova. “Your father, Mikhail Doover, was a brilliant scientist. He found me drowning in a little river, still trapped in a cat’s body. The shard was dragging me down beneath a bridge. Your father happened to be walking along Nevsky Prospect. When he spotted me, he jumped straight off the bridge and swam after me. He pulled me out, carried me on his shoulder, and brought me safely to shore. I was grateful. He took me home and asked what had happened to me, so I told him everything. He decided to help. He created the Vacuum—not just a time machine, but a guide that could sense the shards and travel between layers of reality. It was built using the shard’s genetic material, which is why it can detect the others.”

The Vacuum interrupted: “And he installed an artificial intelligence system in me, giving me the ability to think and analyse.”

The cat cleared its throat. “If that’s all, may I continue? We began searching for the shards. But Ra-Hotep, who had become a powerful Dark Mage over the centuries, tracked us down. He kidnapped Mikhail.”

At that very moment, someone hammered on Vova’s apartment door—so loudly that the secret room shook and the bottles on the shelves rattled. The cat’s ears twitched. The fur along its back stood on end.

“He’s here,” the cat whispered. The three of them ran into the living room. They could hear Vova’s mother screaming. She was shouting as loudly as she could because there was nothing else she could do. The Dark Mage had smashed through the door and stormed into the apartment, surrounded by his shadow minions. “Give me the shard, and nobody gets hurt!” he demanded.

The cat switched on the Vacuum, which promptly sucked up the shadows one after another. The Dark Mage realised he was losing, and, unwilling to leave empty-handed, grabbed Vova’s mother. Vova rushed forward to stop him, but they were already dissolving into smoke. He tried with all his strength to hold on to his mum, but failed. Rage and despair burst out of him in a single cry: “NO!”

The cat and the Vacuum tried to comfort him. They rehung the door the Dark Mage had torn off its hinges. Vova understood that crying wouldn't bring anyone back, and at last he stopped. A new certainty settled inside him: the cat and the Vacuum were now the people closest to him. They were the only ones who could help him get his parents back. He had known them for barely a couple of hours, but he decided to stay with them.

After fixing the door, they sat down together and had tea with the biscuits left in the fridge from the day before.

Chapter 2. Vova's New Life

Night fell. Everyone went to bed. Vova slept in his room, the cat stretched out on the sofa in the living room, and the Vacuum settled on the doormat in the hallway, right beside the power socket. Vova fetched its charger from the secret room, plugged it in, and went to sleep.

The next morning, everyone woke up hungry but full of energy. Unfortunately, the fridge was completely empty. Vova dashed to his room and smashed his piggy bank. It wasn't easy: he had been saving up for rollerblades for six whole months. But he understood that his future—and the survival of his new friends—depended on it. He counted the money slowly, entering every single rouble into a calculator. The Vacuum offered to help with its built-in scanner. It turned out there were five thousand roubles in the piggy bank.

Vova went into the kitchen, found a shopping bag in the cupboard, and headed to the shop. He bought supplies, sticking to the essentials. Instead of crisps and fizzy drinks, he chose milk, bread, and food that would keep for a long time, such as grains and tinned goods.

On his way back, he checked the letterboxes in the entrance hall and found a letter addressed to them. He took it upstairs, handed the shopping to the Vacuum, and announced, "We've got mail."

"It's probably a ransom note," said the Vacuum. "The Dark Mage wants us to hand over the shard in exchange for your mum."

Vova handed it over. The Vacuum read it and discovered that it wasn't a ransom demand at all. It was a utility bill: seven thousand roubles.

"Vova," the cat asked, "you wouldn't happen to have another piggy bank, would you?"

"No," Vova said sadly.

So the cat, the Vacuum, and Vova held an emergency kitchen meeting to discuss where they could get the money. They ate sprat sandwiches while they thought. Eventually, the cat decided they needed to start a business. With their last hundred roubles, he bought a book called *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

Chapter 3. The Cat's Business

The cat decided to make some money. He came up with a brilliant business idea: people could leave their dogs and other pets with him while they went on holiday. The cat would then rent the animals out to a zoo and charge the zoo as well.

He had found the idea in a book called *How to Become a Millionaire*. The very first page offered this advice: "Sell something you don't need." Unfortunately, the only thing they didn't need was the book itself. The cat insisted that the book was essential.

There was also the option of selling Vova. But the cat decided it would be better to rent him out to do other people's homework. The customers who used this service received nothing but failing grades. Vova even managed to get a first-grader's homework wrong. So the cat abandoned that idea —without, naturally, refunding anyone's money.

The pet-rental business also had to close. The zoo explained that the animals didn't have the required paperwork. The cat called the zoo owners "a pack of wolves with spinal problems"—in other words, a bunch of hunchbacked dogs.

He also tried to rent the animals out to a circus, but they were judged not circus-worthy. In the end, the cat had to share one room with an entire zoo full of different creatures, and he absolutely hated it. Then again, who would enjoy living in a house where someone was barking or begging for food every second?

Vova spent his days rushing from one animal to another: feeding them, petting them, and playing with them. The menagerie finally began to shrink when the owners returned and collected their pets. Little by little, the house was cleared out.

Luckily for all three of them, the cat had earned enough to pay the utility bill. The whole business adventure had taken about a week.

Chapter 4. The Move

During one of their kitchen meetings, they decided to move in with Vova's grandparents. That way, they wouldn't waste all the money they had earned or have to invent another business. Vova's grandmother lived in a village, so they set off by train.

They bought one ticket for Vova on a commuter train that arrived fifteen minutes later. It was filthy and disgusting, as if it had been running since the Soviet era. The heroes climbed aboard, covering their noses with their hands. Everyone did this except the Vacuum, which couldn't smell anything. That feature had been added deliberately so it wouldn't sneeze whenever dust got into its hose.

They found Vova's seat and settled in. The cat curled up on his shoulder, while the Vacuum slipped beneath the bench and parked itself beside Vova's suitcase. It fell asleep almost immediately, but five minutes later the conductor's footsteps woke it up. She checked Vova's ticket and passport. Luckily, she had no idea that the cat could talk—or that the Vacuum could think.

The journey took three hours, with about five stops along the way. At last they arrived, escaped the stinking train, and walked out of the station. It took them about fifteen minutes to reach Grandma's house. They knocked. She peered through the peephole, spotted her beloved grandson, and welcomed him with open arms.

Then she noticed the cat on his shoulder and the Vacuum rolling along beside him. "And who are these?" she asked.

Vova had to explain everything. Then they all went inside. Grandma began preparing dinner while the heroes talked about their journey. A little later, Vova's grandfather came into the room. He was delighted to see his grandson, though rather surprised by his new friends. Grandma gave him a quick explanation. By the time they had finished talking, dinner was ready. They all sat down to eat—and the heroes moved in.

Chapter 5. The First Journey: A Lesson in Wisdom

Now that our heroes had settled in the village and sorted out their everyday problems—including the utility bills—they were finally ready to start searching for the shards.

They pressed the button on the Vacuum, and it opened a portal. The heroes stepped through and arrived in the age of Archimedes. When Vova emerged, he could hardly believe his eyes. He was seeing something he had never seen before: Ancient Greece, its theatres, and the Colosseum. As they walked, he kept rubbing his eyes. He still couldn't quite believe that any of it was real. He had already been forced to accept the existence of a talking cat and a time machine in the shape of a vacuum cleaner, but this was something else.

The Vacuum gave him a historical tour of Ancient Greece, explaining absolutely everything. Eventually, they reached the home of Archimedes. Vova had seen pictures of him in books, but now he was looking at the real man—and he looked a little different from the illustrations.

Vova got straight to the point. "We need a shard."

"Not long ago, I saw a strange, mysterious shard fall from the sky," Archimedes replied. "I was surprised, so I took it home to study it and discover where it came from. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to understand it fully. I'll give it to you, since no matter how hard I try, I can't make sense of it. But first, young man, answer a question so I know I'm handing it over to the right person. What is an angle bisector?"

Vova went deep into thought. He remembered a silly little rhyme about an angle bisector and blurted out: "An angle bisector is a rat that runs around the corners and splits an angle in half!"

At that very moment, a tiny rat scurried out of a little hole, climbed onto Archimedes' palm, and said, "Well, it seems everyone knows about me."

Archimedes burst out laughing. "Take your shard!"

The cat quickly grabbed it. He was barely able to stop himself from trying to eat the little rat. He wasn't entirely a cat, but sometimes his animal instincts got the better of him. He hissed to the Vacuum that it was time to leave. They said goodbye to Archimedes and the rat, then returned to their own time.

Vova felt a little strange after the adventure. He decided to get a drink of water and calm down after such an exciting, if rather chaotic and rapid, journey.

Meanwhile, the Dark Mage sat in his gloomy, well-hidden cave, watching the heroes through his magic cauldron. "They've got a second shard already. I have to get those shards!" he muttered. Then, what seemed to him a stroke of absolute genius, came to mind. He decided to bring his mice to life.

Fortunately, his filthy cave was full of them. He grabbed one and used a magic potion he had left over from the previous magical clearance sale, where he had got it at a huge discount. He brought the mouse to life—or, more accurately, gave it a personality.

"Your mission is to steal those two shards while our heroes are asleep," he told it. "I could do it myself, but I might wake them up. Besides, it's much easier to spot a huge man than a tiny mouse. Now, get into the cauldron!"

"Are you going to turn me into soup?" the mouse asked.

"Of course not! What kind of person do you take me for? I'm a vegetarian. You need to climb into the cauldron so you can get to their house as quickly as possible and nick the shards."

"Wouldn't it be easier to write them a letter saying you're holding Vova Doover's mother hostage, and that you'll give her back if they send you the shards?" the mouse suggested.

"That's a terrible plan," the Dark Mage replied. "That way I'd only get two shards. With your help, I can get all of them. I'm saving the hostage plan for later. Now get into that blasted cauldron and steal the shards!"

It took the mouse about ten minutes to climb onto the cauldron. “Wouldn’t it have been easier if you’d just thrown me in?” it asked.

“No,” said the Dark Mage. “That would have been far too easy. Besides, I wanted to make sure you had the determination and perseverance to see a task through.”

The mouse was rather annoyed, but jumped into the liquid anyway. Sure enough, it appeared in Vova’s house and immediately began searching for the shards.

At that moment, the cat was asleep on the kitchen sofa. By coincidence, the mouse had appeared in the same room. The cat caught its scent and woke instantly. “I smell a mouse,” he muttered.

He got up and switched on the light. The mouse hid behind a cupboard, but the cat tracked it down and pounced. It tried to escape, but he cornered it. The noise woke everyone else, who rushed in to find out what was happening—and why they couldn’t get a decent night’s sleep.

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