

A PLUME BOOK

THE MAGICIANS

LEV GROSSMAN is the book critic for *Time* magazine and author of the international bestseller *Codex*. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Praise for *The Magicians*

The Magicians is to Harry Potter as a shot of Irish whiskey is to a glass of weak tea. Solidly rooted in the traditions of both fantasy and mainstream literary fiction, the novel tips its hat to Oz and Narnia as well as to Harry, but don't mistake this for a children's book. Grossman's sensibilities are thoroughly adult, his narrative dark and dangerous and full of twists. Hogwarts was never like this."

—George R. R. Martin, bestselling author of *A Game of Thrones*

The Magicians ought to be required reading for anyone who has ever fallen in love with a fantasy series, or wished that they went to a school for wizards. Lev Grossman has written a terrific, at times almost painfully perceptive novel of the fantastic that brings to mind both Jay McInerney and J. K. Rowling."

—Kelly Link, author of *Magic for Beginners* and *Stranger Things Happen*

"Anyone who grew up reading about magical wardrobes and unicorns and talking trees before graduating to *Less Than Zero* and *The Secret History* and *Bright Lights, Big City* will immediately feel right at home with this smart, beautifully written book by Lev Grossman. *The Magicians* is fantastic, in all senses of the word. It's strange, fanciful, extravagant, eccentric, and truly remarkable—a great story, masterfully told."

—Scott Smith, bestselling author of *The Ruins* and *A Simple Plan*

The Magicians is a spellbinding, fast-moving, dark fantasy book for grown-ups that feels like an instant classic. I read it in a niffin-blue blaze of page turning, enthralled by Grossman's verbal and imaginative wizardry, his complex characters, and, most of all, his superb, brilliant inquiry into the wondrous, dangerous world of magic."

—Kate Christensen, PEN/Faulkner Award-winning author of *The Great Man* and *The Epicure's Lament*

"Remember the last time you ran home to finish a book? This is it, folks. *The Magicians* is the most dazzling, erudite, and thoughtful fantasy novel to date. You'll be bedazzled by the magic but also brought short by what it has to say about the world we live in."

—Gary Shteyngart, author of *Absurdistan* and *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*

"*The Magicians* brilliantly explores the hidden underbelly of fantasy and easy magic, taking what's simple on the surface and turning it over to show us the complicated writhing mess beneath. It's like seeing the worlds of Narnia and Harry Potter through a 3-D magnifying glass." —Naomi Novik, author of *His Majesty's Dragon*

"Fresh and compelling . . . *The Magicians* is a great fairy tale, written for grown-ups but appealing to our most basic desires for stories to bring about some re-enchantment with the world, where monsters lurk but where a young man with a little magic may prevail." —*The Washington Post*

"*The Magicians* is original . . . slyly funny." —*USA Today*

"Lev Grossman's playful fantasy novel *The Magicians* pays homage to a variety of sources . . . with such verve and ease that you quickly forget the references and lose yourself in the story." —*O, The Oprah Magazine*

"I felt like I was poppin' peyote buttons with J. K. Rowling when I was reading Lev Grossman's new novel *The Magicians* . . . couldn't put it down." —Mickey Rapkin, *GQ*

"The novel manages a literary magic trick: it's both an enchantingly written fantasy and a moving deconstruction of enchantingly realized fantasies." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Intriguing, coming-of-age fantasy." —*The Boston Globe* (Pick of the Week)

"*The Magicians* by Lev Grossman is a very entertaining book; one of those summer page-turners that you wish went on for another six volumes. Grossman takes a good number of the best childhood fantasy books from the last seventy-five years and distills their ability to fascinate into the fan-boy mind of his protagonist, Quentin Coldwater. . . . There is no doubt that this book is inventive storytelling and Grossman is at the height of his powers." —*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Entertaining." —*People*

"Lev Grossman's novel *The Magicians* may just be the most subversive, gripping, and enchanting fantasy novel I've read this century. . . . Grossman is a hell of a pacer, and the book rips along, whole seasons tossed out in a single sentence, all the boring mortar ground off the bricks, so that the book comes across as a sheer, seamless face that you can't stop yourself from tumbling down once you launch yourself off the first page. This isn't just an exercise in exploring what we love about fantasy and the lies we tell ourselves about it—it's a shit-kicking, gripping, tightly plotted novel that makes you want to take the afternoon off work to finish it." —Cory Doctorow, *Boing Boing*

"An irresistible storytelling momentum makes *The Magicians* a great summer book, both thoughtful and enchanting."
—Salon.com

"Grossman skillfully moves us through four years of school and a postgraduate adventure, never letting the pace slacken . . . beguiling."
—*The Seattle Times*

"Through sheer storytelling grace and imaginative power, Lev Grossman [creates] an adventure that's both enthralling and mature."
—*Details*

"Mixing the magic of the most beloved children's fantasy classics (from Narnia and Oz to Harry Potter and Earthsea) with the sex, excess, angst, and anticlimax of life in college and beyond, Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* reimagines modern-day fantasy for grown-ups. [It] breathes life into a cast of characters you want to know . . . and does what [some] claim books never really manage to do: 'get you out, really out, of where you were and into somewhere better.' Or if not better, at least a heck of a lot more interesting."
—*The Courier-Journal* (Louisville)

"This gripping novel draws on the conventions of contemporary and classic fantasy novels in order to upend them, and tell a darkly cunning story about the power of imagination itself. [*The Magicians* is] an unexpectedly moving coming-of-age story."
—*The New Yorker*

"Fantasy fans can't afford to miss the darkly comic and unforgettably queasy experience of reading this book—and be glad for reality."
—*Booklist* (starred review)

"This is a book for grown-up fans of children's fantasy and would appeal to those who loved Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. Highly recommended."
—*Library Journal* (starred review)

"Very dark and very scary, with no simple answers provided—fantasy for grown-ups, in other words, and very satisfying indeed."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Stirring, complex, adventurous . . . from the life of Quentin Coldwater, his slacker Park Slope Harry Potter, Lev Grossman delivers superb coming-of-age fantasy."
—Junot Díaz, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

ALSO BY LEV GROSSMAN

Codex

The Magician King

The Magician's Land

Jangal Publication

THE MAGICIANS

A Novel

LEV GROSSMAN



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PLUME

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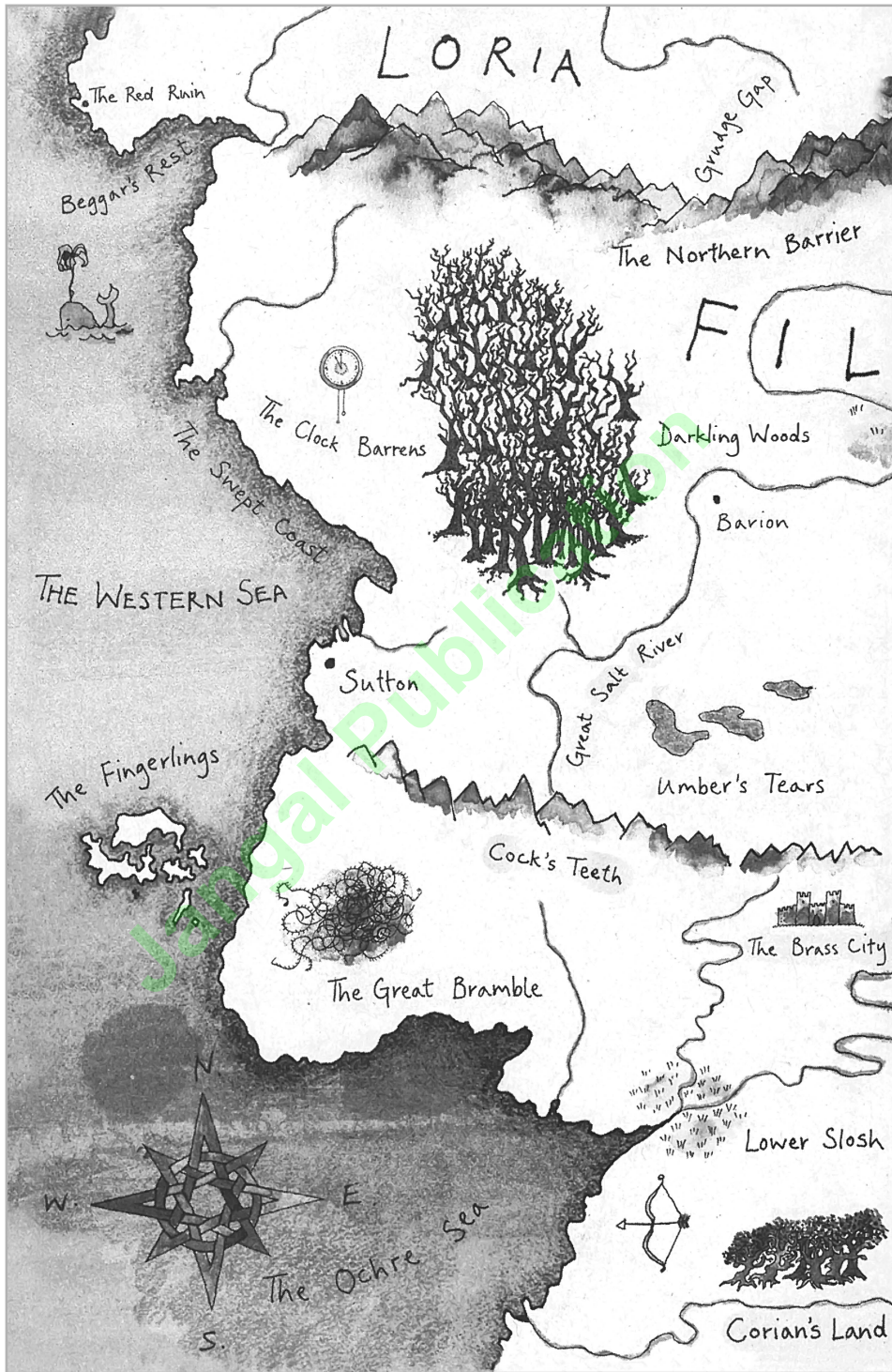
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FOR LILY

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Broken Bay

The Retreat

LORRY

Ember's Tomb

The Northern Marsh

The Chankly Bore

The Nameless Mountains

Chatwin's Torrent

Burnt River

Wormwood

The Silver Banks

Castle Whitespire

The Twin Harbours

Hen's Teeth

Brighthaven

Milkwater River

Morgan Downs

The Southern Orchard

The Copper Mountains

The Wandering Desert

*I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.*

—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Jangal Publication

BOOK I

Jangal Publication

BROOKLYN

Quentin did a magic trick. Nobody noticed. They picked their way along the cold, uneven sidewalk together: James, Julia, and Quentin. James and Julia held hands. That's how things were now. The sidewalk wasn't quite wide enough, so Quentin trailed after them, like a sulky child. He would rather have been alone with Julia, or just alone period, but you couldn't have everything. Or at least the available evidence pointed overwhelmingly to that conclusion.

"Okay!" James said over his shoulder. "Q. Let's talk strategy."

James seemed to have a sixth sense for when Quentin was starting to feel sorry for himself. Quentin's interview was in seven minutes. James was right after him.

"Nice firm handshake. Lots of eye contact. Then when he's feeling comfortable, you hit him with a chair and I'll break his password and e-mail Princeton."

"Just be yourself, Q," Julia said.

Her dark hair was pulled back in a wavy bunch. Somehow it made it worse that she was always so nice to him.

"How is that different from what I said?"

Quentin did the magic trick again. It was a very small trick, a basic one-handed sleight with a nickel. He did it in his coat pocket where nobody could see. He did it again, then he did it backward.

"I have one guess for his password," James said. "*Password.*"

It was kind of incredible how long this had been going on, Quentin thought. They were only seventeen, but he felt like he'd known James and

Julia forever. The school systems in Brooklyn sorted out the gifted ones and shoved them together, then separated the ridiculously brilliant ones from the merely gifted ones and shoved *them* together, and as a result they'd been bumping into each other in the same speaking contests and regional Latin exams and tiny, specially convened ultra-advanced math classes since elementary school. The nerdiest of the nerds. By now, their senior year, Quentin knew James and Julia better than he knew anybody else in the world, not excluding his parents, and they knew him. Everybody knew what everybody else was going to say before they said it. Everybody who was going to sleep with anybody else had already done it. Julia—pale, freckled, dreamy Julia, who played the oboe and knew even more physics than he did—was never going to sleep with Quentin.

Quentin was thin and tall, though he habitually hunched his shoulders in a vain attempt to brace himself against whatever blow was coming from the heavens, and which would logically hit the tall people first. His shoulder-length hair was freezing in clumps. He should have stuck around to dry it after gym, especially with his interview today, but for some reason—maybe he was in a self-sabotaging mood—he hadn't. The low gray sky threatened snow. It seemed to Quentin like the world was offering up special little tableaux of misery just for him: crows perched on power lines, stepped-in dog shit, windblown trash, the corpses of innumerable wet oak leaves being desecrated in innumerable ways by innumerable vehicles and pedestrians.

"God, I'm full," James said. "I ate too much. Why do I always eat too much?"

"Because you're a greedy pig?" Julia said brightly. "Because you're tired of being able to see your feet? Because you're trying to make your stomach touch your penis?"

James put his hands behind his head, his fingers in his wavy chestnut hair, his camel cashmere coat wide open to the November cold, and belched mightily. Cold never bothered him. Quentin felt cold all the time, like he was trapped in his own private individual winter.

James sang, to a tune somewhere between "Good King Wenceslas" and "Bingo":

*In olden times there was a boy
Young and strong and brave-o*

*He wore a sword and rode a horse
And his name was Dave-o . . .*

“God!” Julia shrieked. “Stop!”

James had written this song five years ago for a middle-school talent show skit. He still liked to sing it; by now they all knew it by heart. Julia shoved him, still singing, into a garbage can, and when that didn't work she snatched off his watch cap and started beating him over the head with it.

“My hair! My beautiful interview hair!”

King James, Quentin thought. *Le roi s'amuse.*

“I hate to break up the party,” he said, “but we've got like two minutes.”

“Oh dear, oh dear!” Julia twittered. “The duchess! We shall be quite late!”

I should be happy, Quentin thought. I'm young and alive and healthy. I have good friends. I have two reasonably intact parents—viz., Dad, an editor of medical textbooks, and Mom, a commercial illustrator with ambitions, thwarted, of being a painter. I am a solid member of the middle-middle class. My GPA is a number higher than most people even realize it is possible for a GPA to be.

But walking along Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn, in his black overcoat and his gray interview suit, Quentin knew he wasn't happy. Why not? He had painstakingly assembled all the ingredients of happiness. He had performed all the necessary rituals, spoken the words, lit the candles, made the sacrifices. But happiness, like a disobedient spirit, refused to come. He couldn't think what else to do.

He followed James and Julia past bodegas, laundromats, hipster boutiques, cell-phone stores limned with neon piping, past a bar where old people were already drinking at three forty-five in the afternoon, past a brown-brick Veterans of Foreign Wars hall with plastic patio furniture on the sidewalk in front of it. All of it just confirmed his belief that his real life, the life he should be living, had been mislaid through some clerical error by the cosmic bureaucracy. This couldn't be it. It had been diverted somewhere else, to somebody else, and he'd been issued this shitty substitute *faux* life instead.

Maybe his real life would turn up in Princeton. He did the trick with the nickel in his pocket again.

“Are you playing with your wang, Quentin?” James asked.

Quentin blushed.

“I am not playing with my wang.”

“Nothing to be ashamed of.” James clapped him on the shoulder. “Clears the mind.”

The wind bit through the thin material of Quentin’s interview suit, but he refused to button his overcoat. He let the cold blow through it. It didn’t matter, he wasn’t really there anyway.

He was in Fillory.

Christopher Plover’s *Fillory and Further* is a series of five novels published in England in the 1930s. They describe the adventures of the five Chatwin children in a magical land that they discover while on holiday in the countryside with their eccentric aunt and uncle. They aren’t really on holiday, of course—their father is up to his hips in mud and blood at Passchendaele, and their mother has been hospitalized with a mysterious illness that is probably psychological in nature, which is why they’ve been hastily packed off to the country for safekeeping.

But all that unhappiness takes place far in the background. In the foreground, every summer for three years, the children leave their various boarding schools and return to Cornwall, and each time they do they find their way into the secret world of Fillory, where they have adventures and explore magical lands and defend the gentle creatures who live there against the various forces that menace them. The strangest and most persistent of those enemies is a veiled figure known only as the Watcherwoman, whose horological enchantments threaten to stall time itself, trapping all of Fillory at five o’clock on a particularly dreary, drizzly afternoon in late September.

Like most people Quentin read the Fillory books in grade school. Unlike most people—unlike James and Julia—he never got over them. They were where he went when he couldn’t deal with the real world, which was a lot. (The Fillory books were both a consolation for Julia not loving him and also probably a major reason why she didn’t.) And it was true,

there was a strong whiff of the English nursery about them, and he felt secretly embarrassed when he got to the parts about the Cozy Horse, an enormous, affectionate equine creature who trots around Fillory by night on velvet hooves, and whose back is so broad you can sleep on it.

But there was a more seductive, more dangerous truth to Fillory that Quentin couldn't let go of. It was almost like the Fillory books—especially the first one, *The World in the Walls*—were about reading itself. When the oldest Chatwin, melancholy Martin, opens the cabinet of the grandfather clock that stands in a dark, narrow back hallway in his aunt's house and slips through into Fillory (Quentin always pictured him awkwardly pushing aside the pendulum, like the uvula of a monstrous throat), it's like he's opening the covers of a book, but a book that did what books always promised to do and never actually quite did: get you out, really out, of where you were and into somewhere better.

The world Martin discovers in the walls of his aunt's house is a world of magical twilight, a landscape as black and white and stark as a printed page, with prickly stubblefields and rolling hills crisscrossed by old stone walls. In Fillory there's an eclipse every day at noon, and seasons can last for a hundred years. Bare trees scratch at the sky. Pale green seas lap at narrow white beaches made of broken shells. In Fillory things mattered in a way they didn't in this world. In Fillory you felt the appropriate emotions when things happened. Happiness was a real, actual, achievable possibility. It came when you called. Or no, it never left you in the first place.

They stood on the sidewalk in front of the house. The neighborhood was fancier here, with wide sidewalks and overhanging trees. The house was brick, the only unattached residential structure in a neighborhood of row houses and brownstones. It was locally famous for having played a role in the bloody, costly Battle of Brooklyn. It seemed to gently reproach the cars and streetlights around it with memories of its gracious Old Dutch past.

If this were a Fillory novel—Quentin thought, just for the record—the house would contain a secret gateway to another world. The old man who lived there would be kindly and eccentric and drop cryptic

remarks, and then when his back was turned Quentin would stumble on a mysterious cabinet or an enchanted dumbwaiter or whatever, through which he would gaze with wild surmise on the clean breast of another world.

But this wasn't a Fillory novel.

"So," Julia said. "Give 'em Hades."

She wore a blue serge coat with a round collar that made her look like a French schoolgirl.

"See you at the library maybe."

"Cheers."

They bumped fists. She dropped her gaze, embarrassed. She knew how he felt, and he knew she knew, and there was nothing more to say about it. He waited, pretending to be fascinated by a parked car, while she kissed James good-bye—she put a hand on his chest and kicked up her heel like an old-timey starlet—then he and James walked slowly up the cement path to the front door.

James put his arm around Quentin's shoulders.

"I know what you think, Quentin," he said gruffly. Quentin was taller, but James was broader, more solidly built, and he pulled Quentin off balance. "You think nobody understands you. But I do." He squeezed Quentin's shoulder in an almost fatherly way. "I'm the only one who does."

Quentin said nothing. You could envy James, but you couldn't hate him, because along with being handsome and smart he was also, at heart, kind and good. More than anybody else Quentin had ever met, James reminded him of Martin Chatwin. But if James was a Chatwin, what did that make Quentin? The real problem with being around James was that he was always the hero. And what did that make you? Either the sidekick or the villain.

Quentin rang the doorbell. A soft, tinny clatter erupted somewhere in the depths of the darkened house. An old-fashioned, analog ring. He rehearsed a mental list of his extracurriculars, personal goals, etc. He was absolutely prepared for this interview in every possible way, except maybe his incompletely dried hair, but now that the ripened fruit of all that preparation was right in front of him he suddenly lost any desire for it. He wasn't surprised. He was used to this anticlimactic feeling, where by