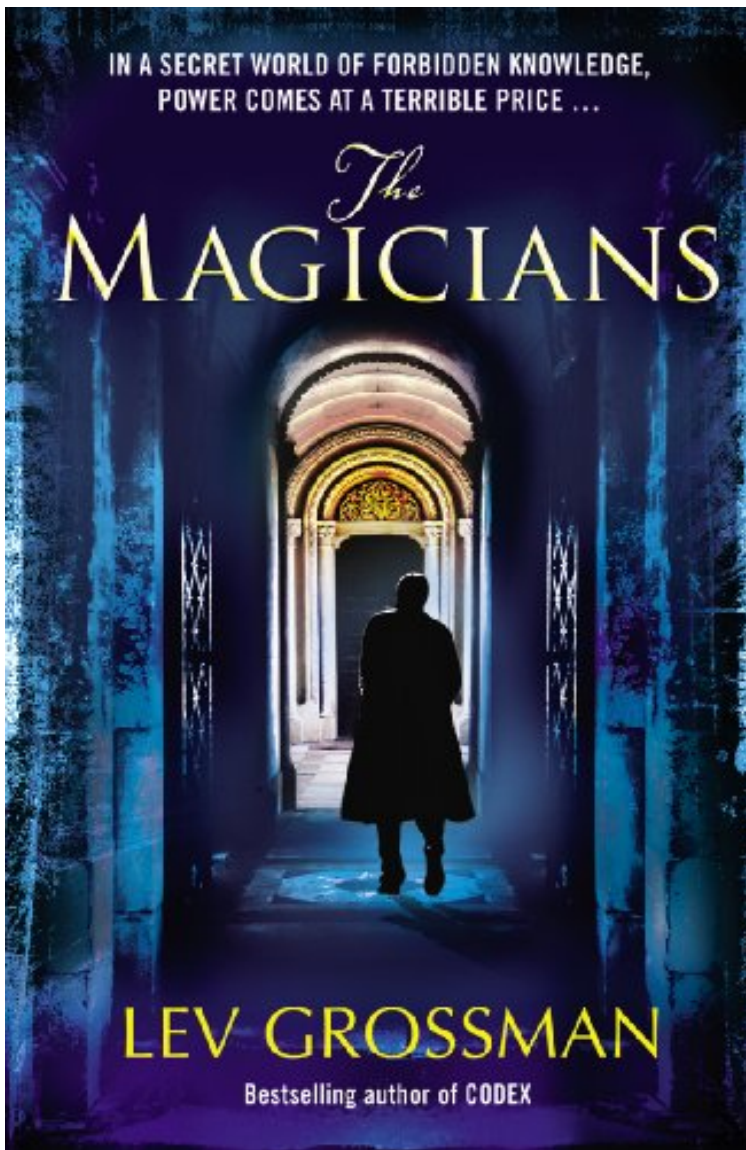


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# The Magicians: (Book 1)



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNOW A MAJOR TV SERIESIn a secret world of forbidden knowledge, power comes at a terrible price ...Quentin Coldwater's life is changed forever by an apparently chance encounter: when he turns up for his entrance interview to Princeton he finds his interviewer dead - but a strange envelope bearing Quentin's name leads him down a very different path to any he'd ever imagined. The envelope, and the mysterious manuscript it contains, leads to a secret world of obsession and privilege, a world of freedom and power and, for a while, it's a world that seems to answer all Quentin's desires. But the idyll cannot last - and when it's finally shattered, Quentin is drawn into something darker and far more dangerous than anything he could ever have expected ...ExtraitTable of ContentsTitle PageCopyright

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GROSSMANCodexVIKING Published by the Penguin Group Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd) Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England First published in 2009 by Viking Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Copyright Lev Grossman, 2009 All rights reserved PUBLISHERS NOTE: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. ISBN: 9781101082287 Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book. The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrightable materials. Your support of the authors rights is appreciated. FOR LILY

Ill break my staff, Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, And deeper than did ever plummet sound Ill drown my book. William Shakespeare, The Tempest BOOK IBROOKLYN 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. Thats how things were now. The sidewalk wasnt 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 couldnt have everything. Or at least the available evidence pointed overwhelmingly to that conclusion. Okay! James said over his shoulder. Q. Lets talk strategy. James seemed to have a sixth sense for when Quentin was starting to feel sorry for himself.

Quentins interview was in seven minutes. James was right after him. Nice firm handshake. Lots of eye contact. Then when hes feeling comfortable, you hit him with a chair and Ill 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 hed 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 theyd 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. Juliapale, 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 hadnt. 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 Plovers 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 aunts 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 theres 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 didnt 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 wasnt 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 Quentins 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 Quentins shoulder in an almost fatherly way. Im the only one who does. Quentin said nothing. You could envy James, but you couldnt 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 wasnt surprised. He was used to this anticlimactic feeling, where by the time youve done all the work to get something you dont even want it anymore. He had it all the time. It was one of the few things he could depend on. The doorway was guarded by a depressingly ordinary suburban screen door. Orange and purple zinnias were still blooming, against all horticultural logic, in a random scatter pattern in black earth beds on either side of the doorstep. How weird, Quentin thought, with no curiosity at all, that they would still be alive in November. He withdrew his ungloved hands into the sleeves of his coat and placed the ends of the sleeves under his arms. Even though it felt cold enough to snow, somehow it began to rain. It was still raining five minutes later. Quentin knocked on the door again, then pushed lightly. It opened a crack, and a wave of warm air tumbled out. The warm, fruity smell of a strangers house. Hello? Quentin called. He and James exchanged glances. He pushed the door all the way open. Better give him another minute. Who even does this in their spare time? Quentin said. I bet hes a pedophile. The foyer was dark and silent and muffled with Oriental rugs. Still outside, James leaned on the doorbell. No one answered. I dont think anybodys here, Quentin said. That James wasnt coming inside suddenly made him want to go inside more. If the interviewer actually turned out to be a gatekeeper to the magical land of Fillory, he thought, it was too bad he wasnt wearing more practical shoes. A staircase went up. On the left was a stiff, unused-looking dining room, on the right a cozy den with leather armchairs and a carved, man-size wooden cabinet standing by itself in a corner. Interesting. An old nautical map taller than he was took up half of one wall, with an ornately barbed compass rose. He massaged the walls in search of a light switch. There was a cane chair in one corner, but he didnt sit. All the blinds were drawn. The quality of the darkness was less like a house with the curtains drawn than it was like actual night, as if the sun had set or been eclipsed the moment he crossed the threshold. Quentin slow-motion-walked into the den. Hed go back outside and call. In another minute. He had to at least look. The darkness was like a prickling electric cloud around him. The cabinet was enormous, so big you could climb into it. He placed his hand on its small,

dinged brass knob. It was unlocked. His fingers trembled. Le roi samuse. He couldnt help himself. It felt like the world was revolving around him, like his whole life had been leading up to this moment. It was a liquor cabinet. A big one, there was practically a whole bar in there. Quentin reached back past the ranks of softly jingling bottles and felt the dry, scratchy plywood at the back just to make sure. Solid. Nothing magical about it. He closed the door, breathing hard, his face burning in the darkness. It was when he looked around to make absolutely sure that nobody was watching that he saw the dead body on the floor. Fifteen minutes later the foyer was full of people and activity. Quentin sat in a corner, in the cane chair, like a pallbearer at the funeral of somebody hed never met. He kept the back of his skull pressed firmly against the cool solid wall like it was his last point of connection to a same reality. James stood next to him. He didnt seem to know where to put his hands. They didnt look at each other. The old man lay flat on his back on the floor.

His stomach was a sizable round hump, his hair a crazy gray Einstein half-noggin. Three paramedics crouched around him, two men and a woman. The woman was disarmingly, almost inappropriately pretty she looked out of place in that grim scene, miscast. The paramedics were at work, but it wasnt the high-speed clinical blitz of an emergency life-saving treatment. This was the other kind, the obligatory failed resuscitation. They were murmuring in low voices, packing up, ripping off adhesive patches, discarding contaminated sharps in a special container. With a practiced, muscular movement one of the men de-intubated the corpse. The old mans mouth was open, and Quentin could see his dead gray tongue. He smelled something that he didnt want to admit was the faint, bitter odor of shit. This is bad, James said, not for the first time. Yes, Quentin said thickly. Extremely bad. His lips and teeth felt numb. If he didnt move, nobody could involve him in this any further. He tried to breathe slowly and keep still. He stared straight ahead, refusing to focus his eyes on what was happening in the den. He knew if he looked at James he would only see his own mental state reflected back at him in an infinite corridor of panic that led nowhere. He wondered when it would be all right for them to leave. He couldnt get rid of a feeling of shame that he was the one who went into the house uninvited, as if that had somehow caused the mans death. I shouldnt have called him a pedophile, Quentin said out loud. That was wrong. Extremely wrong, James agreed. They spoke slowly, like they were both trying out language for the very first time. One of the paramedics, the woman, stood up from where she was squatting by the body. Quentin watched her stretch, heels of her hands pressed to her lumbar region, tipping her head one way, then the other. Then she walked over in their direction, stripping off rubber gloves. Well, she announced cheerfully, hes dead! By her accent she was English. Quentin cleared his clotted throat. The woman chucked the gloves neatly into the trash from across the room. What happened to him? Cerebral hemorrhage. Nice quick way to go, if you have to go. Which he did. He must have been a drinker. She made the drinky-drinky gesture. Her cheeks were flushed from crouching down over the body. She might have been twenty-five at most, and she wore a dark blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, neatly pressed, with one button that didnt match: a stewardess on the connecting flight to hell. Quentin wished she werent so attractive. Unpretty women were so much easier to deal with in some ways you didnt have to face the pain of their probable unattainability. But she was not unpretty. She was pale and thin and unreasonably lovely, with a broad, ridiculously sexy mouth. Well. Quentin didnt know what to say. Im sorry. Why are you sorry? she said. Did you kill him? Im just here for an interview. He did alumni interviews for Princeton. So why do you care? Quentin hesitated. He wondered if hed misunderstood the premise of this conversation. He stood up, which he should have done when she first came over anyway. He was much taller than her. Even under the circumstances, he thought, this person is carrying around a lot of attitude for a paramedic. Its not like shes a real doctor or anything. He wanted to scan her chest for a name tag but didnt want to get caught looking at her breasts. I dont actually care about him, personally, Quentin said carefully, but I do place a certain value on human life in the abstract. So even though I didnt know him, I think I can say that Im sorry that hes dead. What if he was a monster? Maybe he really was a pedophile. Shed overheard him. Maybe. Maybe he was a nice guy. Maybe he was a saint. Maybe. You must spend a lot of time around dead people. Out of the corner of his eye he was vaguely aware that James was watching this exchange, baffled. Well, youre supposed to keep them alive. Or thats what they tell us. It must be hard. The dead ones are a lot less trouble. Quieter. Exactly. The look in her eyes didnt quite match what she was saying. She was studying him. Listen, James cut in. We should probably go. Whats your hurry? she said. Her eyes hadnt left Quentins. Unlike practically everybody, she seemed more interested in him than in James. Listen, I think this guy might have left something for you. She picked up two manila envelopes, document-size, off a marble-topped side table. Quentin frowned. I dont think so. We should probably go, James said. You said that already, the paramedic said. James opened the door. The cold air was a pleasant

shock. It felt real. That was what Quentin needed: more reality. Less of this, whatever this was. Seriously, the woman said. I think you should take these. It might be important. Her eyes wouldn't leave Quentin's face. The day had gone still around them. It was chilly on the stoop, and getting a little damp, and he was roughly ten yards away from a corpse. Listen, we're gonna go, James was saying. Thanks. I'm sure you did everything you could. The pretty paramedic's dark hair was in two heavy ropes of braid. She wore a shiny yellow enamel ring and some kind of fancy silver antique wristwatch. Her nose and chin were tiny and pointy. She was a pale, skinny, pretty angel of death, and she held two manila envelopes with their names on them in block Magic Marker letters. Probably transcripts, confidential recommendations. For some reason, maybe just because he knew James wouldn't, Quentin took the one with his name on it. All right! Good-bye! the paramedic sang. She twirled back into the house and closed the door. They were alone on the stoop. Well, James said. He inhaled through his nose and breathed out firmly. Quentin nodded, as if he were agreeing with something James had said. Slowly they walked back up the path to the sidewalk. He still felt dazed. He didn't especially want to talk to James. Listen, James said. You probably shouldn't have that. I know, Quentin said. You could still put it back, you know. I mean, what if they found out? How would they find out? I don't know. Who knows what's in here? Could come in useful. Yeah, well, lucky thing that guy died then! James said irritably. They walked to the end of the block without speaking, annoyed at each other and not wanting to admit it. The slate sidewalk was wet, and the sky was white with rain. Quentin knew he probably shouldn't have taken the envelope. He was pissed at himself for taking it and pissed at James for not taking his. Look, I'll see you later, James said. I gotta go meet Jules at the library. Right. They shook hands formally. It felt strangely final. Quentin walked away slowly down First Street. A man had died in the house he just left. He was still in a dream. He realized more than he had underneath it all he was relieved that he didn't have to do his Princeton interview today after all. The day was darkening. The sun was setting already behind the gray shell of cloud that covered Brooklyn. For the first time in an hour he thought about all the things he had left to do today: physics problem set, history paper, e-mail, dishes, laundry. The weight of them was dragging him back down the gravity well of the ordinary world. He would have to explain to his parents what happened, and they would, in some way he could never grasp, and therefore could never properly rebut, make him feel like it was his fault. It would all go back to normal. He thought of Julia and James meeting at the library. She would be working on her Western Civ paper for Mr. Karras, a six-week project she would complete in two sleepless days and nights. As ardently as he wished that she were his, and not James's, he could never quite imagine how he would win her. In the most plausible of his many fantasies James died, unexpectedly and painlessly, leaving Julia behind to sink softly weeping into his arms. As he walked Quentin unwound the little red-threaded clasp that held shut the manila envelope. He saw immediately that it wasn't his transcript, or an official document of any kind. The envelope held a notebook. It was old-looking, its corners squashed and rubbed till they were smooth and round, its cover foxed. The first page, handwritten in ink, read: The Magicians Book Six of Fillory and Further. The ink had gone brown with age. The Magicians was not the name of any book by Christopher Plover that Quentin knew of. And any good nerd knew that there were only five books in the Fillory series. When he turned the page a piece of white notepaper, folded over once, flew out and slipped away on the wind. It clung to a wrought-iron area fence for a second before the wind whipped it away again. There was a community garden on the block, a triangular snippet of land too narrow and weirdly shaped to be snapped up by developers. With its ownership a black hole of legal ambiguity, it had been taken over years ago by a collective of enterprising neighbors who had trucked out the acid sand native to Brooklyn and replaced it with rich, fertile loam from upstate. For a while they'd raised pumpkins and tomatoes and spring bulbs and raked out little Japanese serenity gardens, but lately they'd neglected it, and hardy urban weeds had taken root instead. They were running riot and strangling their frailer, more exotic competitors. It was into this tangled thicket that the note flew and disappeared. This late in the year all the plants were dead or dying, even the weeds, and Quentin waded into them hip-deep, dry stems catching on his pants, his leather shoes crunching brown broken glass. It crossed his mind that the note might just possibly contain the hot paramedic's phone number. The garden was narrow, but it went surprisingly far back. There were three or four sizable trees in it, and the farther in he pushed the darker and more overgrown it got. He caught a glimpse of the note, up high, plastered against a trellis encrusted with dead vines. It could clear the back fence before he caught up with it. His phone rang: his dad. Quentin ignored it. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw something flit past behind the bracken, large and pale, but when he turned his head it was gone. He pushed past the corpses of gladiolas, petunias, shoulder-high sunflowers, rosebushes brittle, stiff stems and flowers frozen in death into ornate toile patterns. He would have thought

hed gone all the way through to Seventh Avenue by now. He shoved his way even deeper in, brushing up against who knew what toxic flora. A case of poison fucking ivy, thats all he needed now. It was odd to see that here and there among the dead plants a few vital green stalks still poked up, drawing sustenance from who knew where. He caught a whiff of something sweet in the air. He stopped. All of a sudden it was quiet. No car horns, no stereos, no sirens. His phone had stopped ringing. It was bitter cold, and his fingers were numb. Turn back or go on? He squeezed farther in through a hedge, closing his eyes and squinching up his face against the scratchy twigs. He stumbled over something, an old stone. He felt suddenly nauseous. He was sweating. When he opened his eyes again he was standing on the edge of a huge, wide, perfectly level green lawn surrounded by trees. The smell of ripe grass was overpowering. There was hot sun on his face. The sun was at the wrong angle. And where the hell were the clouds? The sky was a blinding blue. His inner ear spun sickeningly. He held his breath for a few seconds, then expelled freezing winter air from his lungs and breathed in warm summer air in its place. It was thick with floating pollen. He sneezed. In the middle distance beyond the wide lawn a large house stood, all honey-colored stone and gray slate, adorned with chimneys and gables and towers and roofs and sub-roofs. In the center, over the main house, was a tall, stately clock tower that struck even Quentin as an odd addition to what otherwise looked like a private residence. The clock was in the Venetian style: a single barbed hand circling a face with twenty-four hours marked on it in Roman numerals. Over one wing rose what looked like the green oxidized-copper dome of an observatory. Between house and lawn was a series of inviting landscaped terraces and spinneys and hedges and fountains. Quentin was pretty sure that if he stood very still for a few seconds everything would snap back to normal. He wondered if he was undergoing some dire neurological event. He looked cautiously back over his shoulder. There was no sign of the garden behind him, just some big leafy oak trees, the advance guard of what looked like a pretty serious forest. A rill of sweat ran down his rib cage from his left armpit. It was hot. Quentin dropped his bag on the turf and shrugged out of his overcoat. A bird chirped languidly in the silence. Fifty feet away a tall skinny teenager was leaning against a tree, smoking a cigarette and watching him. He looked about Quentins age. He wore a button-down shirt with a sharp collar and very thin, very pale pink stripes. He didnt look at Quentin, just dragged on his cigarette and exhaled into the summer air. The heat didnt seem to bother him. Hey, Quentin called. Now he looked over. He raised his chin at Quentin, once, but didnt answer. Quentin walked over, as nonchalantly as he could. He really didnt want to look like somebody who had no idea what was going on. Even without his coat on he was sweating like a bastard. He felt like an overdressed English explorer trying to impress a skeptical tropical native. But there was something he had to ask. Is this? Quentin cleared his throat. So is this Fillory? He squinted against the bright sun. The young man looked at Quentin very seriously. He took another long drag on his cigarette, then he shook his head slowly, blowing out the smoke. Nope, he said. Upstate New York. BRAKEBILLS. He didnt laugh. Quentin would appreciate that later. Upstate? Quentin said. What, like Vassar? I saw you come through, the young man said. Come on, you need to go up to the House. He snapped the cigarette away and set off across the wide lawn. He didnt look back to see if Quentin was following, which at first Quentin didnt, but then a sudden fear of being left alone in this place got him moving and he trotted to catch up. The green was enormous, the size of half a dozen football fields. It seemed to take them forever to get across it. The sun beat on the back of Quentins neck. So whats your name? the young man asked, in a tone that made sure Quentin knew that he had no interest in the answer. Quentin. Charming. From? Brooklyn. How old? Seventeen. Im Eliot. Dont tell me anything else, I dont want to know. Dont want to get attached. Quentin had to take a couple of double-time steps to keep up with Eliot. There was something off about Eliots face. His posture was very straight, but his mouth was twisted to one side, in a permanent half grimace that revealed a nest of teeth sticking both in and out at improbable angles. He looked like a child who had been slightly misdelivered, with some subpar forceps handling by the attending. But despite his odd appearance Eliot had an air of effortless self-possession that made Quentin urgently want to be his friend, or maybe just be him period. He was obviously one of those people who felt at home in the world he was naturally buoyant, where Quentin felt like he had to dog-paddle constantly, exhaustingly, humiliatingly, just to get one sip of air. So what is this place? Quentin asked. Do you live here? You mean here at Brakebills? he said airily. Yes, I guess I do. They had reached the far side of the grass. If you can call it living. Eliot led Quentin through a gap in a tall hedge and into a leafy, shadowy labyrinth. The bushes had been trimmed precisely into narrow, branching, fractally ramifying corridors that periodically opened out onto small shady alcoves and courtyards. The shrubbery was so dense that no light penetrated through it, but here and there a heavy yellow stripe of sun fell across the path from above. They passed a plashing fountain here, a somber, rain-ravaged

white stone statue there. It was a good five minutes before they stepped out of the maze, through an opening flanked by two towering topiary bears reared up on their hind legs, onto a stone terrace in the shadow of the large house Quentin had seen from a distance. A breeze made one of the tall, leafy bears seem to turn its head slightly in his direction. The Dean will probably be down to get you in another minute, Eliot said. Here's my advice. Sit there he pointed to a weathered stone bench, like he was telling an overly affectionate dog to stay and try to look like you belong here. And if you tell him you saw me smoking, I will banish you to the lowest circle of hell. Which I've never been there, but if even half of what I hear is true it's almost as bad as Brooklyn. Eliot disappeared back into the hedge maze, and Quentin sat down obediently on the bench. He stared down between his shiny black interview shoes at the gray stone tiles, his backpack and his overcoat in his lap. This is impossible, he thought lucidly; he thought the words in his mind, but they got no purchase on the world around him. He felt like he was having a not-unpleasant drug experience. The tiles were intricately carved with a pattern of twiny vines, or possibly elaborately calligraphic words that had been worn away into illegibility. Little motes and seeds drifted around in the sunlight. If this is a hallucination, he thought, it's pretty damn hi-res. The silence was the strangest part of it. As hard as he listened he couldn't hear a single car. It felt like he was in a movie where the sound track had abruptly cut out. A pair of French doors rattled a few times and then opened. A tall, fat man wearing a seersucker suit strode out onto the terrace. Good afternoon, he said. You would be Quentin Coldwater. He spoke very correctly, as if he wished he had an English accent but wasn't quite pretentious enough to affect one. He had a mild, open face and thin blond hair. Yes, sir. Quentin had never called an adult or anybody else sir in his life, but it suddenly felt appropriate. Welcome to Brakebills College, the man said. I suppose you've heard of us? Actually no, Quentin said. Well, you've been offered a Preliminary Examination here. Do you accept? Quentin didn't know what to say. This wasn't one of the questions he'd prepped for when he got up this morning. I don't know, he said, blinking. I mean, I guess I'm not sure. Perfectly understandable response, but not an acceptable one, I'm afraid. I need a yes or a no. It's just for the Exam, he added helpfully. Quentin had a powerful intuition that if he said no, all of this would be over before the syllable was even fully out of his mouth, and he would be left standing in the cold rain and dog shit of First Street wondering why he'd seemed to feel the warmth of the sun on the back of his neck for a second just then. He wasn't ready for that. Not yet. Sure, okay, he said, not wanting to sound too eager. Yeah. Splendid. He was one of those superficially jolly people whose jolliness didn't quite reach all the way up to his eyes. Let's get you examined. My name is Henry Fogg, no jokes please, I've heard them all and you may address me as Dean. Follow me. You're the last one to arrive, I think, he added. No jokes actually came to Quentin's mind. Inside the house it was hushed and cool, and there was a rich, spicy smell in the air of books and Oriental carpets and old wood and tobacco. The Dean walked ahead of him impatiently. It took Quentin a minute for his eyes to adjust. They hurried through a sitting room hung with murky oil paintings, down a narrow wood-paneled hallway, then up several flights of stairs to a heavy-timbered wooden door. The instant it opened hundreds of eyes flicked up and fixed themselves on Quentin. The room was long and airy and full of individual wooden desks arranged in rows. At each desk sat a serious-looking teenager. It was a classroom, but not the kind Quentin was used to, where the walls were cinder block and covered with bulletin boards and posters with kittens hanging from branches with HANG IN THERE, BABY under them in balloon letters. The walls of this room were old stone. It was full of sunlight, and it stretched back and back and back. It looked like a trick with mirrors. Most of the kids were Quentin's age and appeared to occupy his same general stratum of coolness or lack thereof. But not all. There were a few punks with mohawks or shaved heads, and there was a substantial goth contingent and one of those super Jews, a Hasid. A too-tall girl with too-big red-framed glasses beamed goofily at everybody. A few of the younger girls looked like they'd been crying. One kid had no shirt on and green and red tattoos all over his back. Jesus, Quentin thought, whose parents would let them do that? Another was in a motorized wheelchair. Another was missing his left arm. He wore a dark button-down shirt with one sleeve folded up and held closed with a silver clasp. All the desks were identical, and on each one an ordinary blank blue test booklet was laid out with a very thin, very sharp No. 3 pencil next to it. It was the first thing Quentin had seen here that was familiar. There was one empty seat, toward the back of the room, and he sat down and scooped his chair forward with a deafening screech. He almost thought he saw Julia's face in among the crowd, but she turned away almost immediately, and anyway there was no time. At the front of the room Dean Fogg cleared his throat primly. All right, he said. A few preliminaries. There will be silence during the Examination. You are free to look at other students' papers, but you will find that they appear to you to be blank. Your pencils will not require additional sharpening. If you would like a glass of water, just hold up three fingers above your

head, like this. He demonstrated. Do not worry about feeling unprepared for the Examination. There is no way to study for it, though it would be equally true to say that you have been preparing for it your whole lives. There are only two possible grades, Pass and Fail. If you pass, you will proceed to the second stage of the Examination. If you fail, and most of you will, you will be returned to your homes with a plausible alibi and very little memory of this entire experience. The duration of the test is two and one half hours. Begin. The Dean turned to the blackboard and drew a clock face on it. Quentin looked down at the blank booklet on his desk. It was no longer blank. It was filling with questions; the letters literally swam into being on the paper as he watched. The room filled with a collective rustling of paper, like a flock of birds taking off. Heads bowed in unison. Quentin recognized this motion. It was the motion of a bunch of high-powered type-A test killers getting down to their bloody work. That was all right. He was one of them. Quentin hadn't planned on spending the rest of his afternoon or morning, or whatever this was, taking a standardized test on an unknown subject, at an unknown educational institution, in some unknown alternate climatic zone where it was still summer. He was supposed to be in Brooklyn freezing his ass off and being interviewed by some random senior citizen, currently deceased. But the logic of his immediate circumstances was overwhelming his other concerns, however well founded they might be. He had never been one to argue with logic. A lot of the test was calculus, pretty basic stuff for Quentin, who was so mysteriously good at math that his high school had been forced to outsource that part of his education to Brooklyn College. Nothing more hazardous than some fancy differential geometry and a few linear algebra proofs. But there were more exotic questions, too. Some of them seemed totally pointless. One of them showed him the back of a playing card, not an actual card but a drawing of the back of a playing card, mind you, featuring your standard twin angels riding bicycles and asked him to guess what card it was. How did that make sense? Or later on the test gave him a passage from *The Tempest*, then asked him to make up a fake language, and then translate the Shakespeare into the made-up language. He was then asked questions about the grammar and orthography of his made-up language, and then, honestly, what was the point? questions about the made-up geography and culture and society of the made-up country where his made-up language was so fluently spoken. Then he had to translate the original passage from the fake language back into English, paying particular attention to any resulting distortions in grammar, word choice, and meaning. Seriously. He always gave everything he had on tests, but in this case he wasn't totally sure what he was supposed to give. The test also changed as he took it. The reading-comprehension section showed him a paragraph that vanished as he read it, then quizzed him on its contents. Some new kind of computerized paper hadn't he read somewhere that somebody was working on that? Digital ink? Amazing resolution, though. He was asked to draw a rabbit that wouldn't keep still as he drew it as soon as it had paws it scratched itself luxuriously and then went hopping off around the page, nibbling at the other questions, so that he had to chase it with the pencil to finish filling in the fur. He wound up pacifying it with some hastily sketched radishes and then drawing a fence around it to keep it in line. Soon he forgot about everything else except putting a satisfactory chunk of his neat handwriting next to one question after another, appeasing whatever perverse demands the test made on him. It was an hour before he even looked up from his desk. His ass hurt. He shifted in his chair. The patches of sunlight from the windows had moved. Something else had changed, too. When he'd started every single desk had been filled, but now there was a sprinkling of empty ones. He hadn't noticed anybody leaving. A cold crystal seed of doubt formed in Quentin's stomach. Jesus, they must have finished already. He wasn't used to being outclassed in the classroom. The palms of his hands prickled with sweat, and he smeared them along his thighs. Who were these people? When Quentin flipped to the next page of the test booklet it was blank except for a single word in the center of the page: FIN, in swirly italic type, like at the end of an old movie. He sat back in the chair and pressed the heels of his aching hands against his aching eyes. Well, that was two hours of his life he'd never get back. Quentin still hadn't noticed anybody getting up and walking out, but the room was getting seriously depopulated. There were maybe fifty kids left, and more empty desks than full ones. It was like they were softly and silently slipping out of the room every time he turned his head. The punk with the tattoos and no shirt was still there. He must have finished, or given up, because he was dicking around by ordering more and more glasses of water. His desktop was crowded with glasses. Quentin spent the last twenty minutes staring out the window and practicing a spinning trick with his pencil. The Dean came in again and addressed the room. I'm delighted to inform you all that you will be moving on to the next stage of testing, he said. This stage will be conducted on an individual basis by members of the Brakebills faculty. In the meantime, you may enjoy some refreshment and converse among yourselves. Quentin counted only twenty-two desks still occupied, maybe a tenth of the original group. Bizarrely, a silent, comically correct

butler in white gloves entered and began circulating through the room. He gave each of them a wooden tray with a sandwich roasted red peppers and very fresh mozzarella on sourdough bread a lumpy pear, and a thick square of dark, bitter chocolate. He poured each student a glass of something cloudy and fizzy from an individual bottle without a label. It turned out to be grapefruit soda. Quentin took his lunch and drifted up to the front row, where most of the rest of the test takers were gathering. He felt pathetically relieved to have gotten this far, even though he had no idea why he'd passed and the others had failed, or what he'd get for passing. The butler was patiently loading the clinking, sloshing collection of water glasses from the punks desk onto a tray. Quentin looked for Julia, but either she hadn't made the cut or she'd never been there in the first place. They should have capped it, explained the punk, who said his name was Penny. He had a gentle moony face that was at odds with his otherwise terrifying appearance. How much water you can ask for. Like maybe five glasses at most. I love finding shit like that, where the system screws itself with its own rules. He shrugged. Any way, I was bored. The test told me I was done after twenty minutes. Twenty minutes? Quentin was torn between admiration and envy. Jesus Christ, it took me two hours. The punk shrugged again and made a face: What the hell do you want me to say? Among the test takers, camaraderie warred with mistrust. Some of the kids exchanged names and home towns and cautious observations about the test, though the more they compared notes, the more they realized that none of them had taken the same one. They were from all over the country, except for two who turned out to be from the same Inuit reservation in Saskatchewan. They went around the room telling stories about how they'd gotten here. No two were exactly the same, but there was always a certain family resemblance. Somebody went looking for a lost ball in an alley, or a stray goat in a drainage ditch, or followed an inexplicable extra cable in the high school computer room which led to a server closet that had never been there before. And then green grass and summer heat and somebody to take them up to the exam room. As soon as lunch was over teachers began poking their heads in and calling out the names of candidates. They went alphabetically, so it was only a couple of minutes before a stern woman in her forties with dark shoulder-length hair summoned Quentin Coldwater. He followed her into a narrow wood-paneled room with tall windows that looked out from a surprisingly great height onto the lawn he'd crossed earlier. Chatter from the adjacent exam room cut off abruptly when the door closed. Two chairs faced each other across a worn, hugely thick wooden table. Quentin felt giddy, like he was watching the whole thing on TV. It was ridiculous. But he forced himself to pay attention. This was a competition, and he dominated competitions. That was what he did, and he sensed that the stakes of this one were rising. The table was bare except for a deck of cards and a stack of about a dozen coins. I understand you like magic tricks, Quentin, the woman said. She had a very slight accent, European but otherwise unplaceable. Icelandic? Why don't you show me some? As a matter of fact, Quentin did like magic tricks. His interest in magic had started three years ago, partly inspired by his reading habits but mostly as a way of fattening up his extracurriculars with an activity that wouldn't force him to actually interact with other people. Quentin had spent hundreds of emotionally arid hours with his iPod on palming coins and shuffling cards and producing fake flowers from skinny plastic canes in a trance of boredom. He watched and rewatched grainy, porn-like instructional videotapes in which middle-aged men demonstrated close-up magic passes in front of backdrops made of bedsheets. Magic, Quentin discovered, wasn't romantic at all. It was grim and repetitive and deceptive. And he worked his ass off and became very good at it. There was a store near Quentin's house that sold magic supplies, along with junk electronics, dusty board games, pet rocks, and fake vomit. Ricky, the man behind the counter, who had a beard and sideburns but no mustache, like an Amish farmer, grudgingly agreed to give Quentin some tips. It wasn't long before the student surpassed the master. At seventeen Quentin knew the Scotch and Soda and the tricky one-handed Charlier cut, and he could juggle the elusive Mills Mess pattern with three balls and sometimes, for short ecstatic flights, with four. He earned a small dividend of popularity at school every time he demonstrated his ability to throw, with a fierce, robotic accuracy, an ordinary playing card sidearm so that from a distance of ten feet it stuck edge-on in one of the flavorless Styrofoam apples they served in the cafeteria. Quentin reached for the cards first. He was vain about his shuffling, so he broke out a faro shuffle rather than the standard riffle just in case the woman sitting across from him knew the difference, and how ridiculously hard it was to do a good faro. He ran through his usual routine, which was already calculated to show off as many different skills as possible: false cuts, false shuffles, lifts, sleights, passes, forces. In between tricks he tossed and waterfalled and avalanched the cards from hand to hand. He had regular patter to go with it, but it sounded clumsy and empty in this quiet, airy, beautiful room, in front of this dignified, handsome older woman. The words trailed off. He performed in silence. The cards made shushing, snapping noises in the

stillness. The woman watched him steadily, obediently choosing a card whenever he asked her to, showing no surprise when he recovered it against all odds! from the middle of a thoroughly shuffled deck, or from his shirt pocket, or out of thin air. He switched to the coins. They were fresh new nickels, nicely milled, good crisp edges. He had no props, no cups or folded handkerchiefs, so he stuck to palms and passes, flourishes and catches. The woman watched him in silence for a minute, then reached across the table and touched his arm. Do that one again, she said. He obediently did that one again. The trick was an old one, the Wandering Nickel, wherein a nickel (actually three nickels) moved mysteriously from hand to hand. He kept showing it to the audience and then cheekily vanishing it again; then he pretended to lose track of it entirely; then he triumphantly produced it again, whereupon it appeared to vanish again straight out of his open palm, in plain sight. It was actually a fairly ordinary, if well-scripted, sequence of steals and drops, with one particularly nervy retention-of-vision vanish. Do it again. He did it again. She stopped him in the middle. This part there is a mistake. Where? He frowned. That's how you do it. She pursed her lips and shook her head. The woman plucked three nickels from the stack and without an instant of hesitation, or anything in her manner that acknowledged that she was doing something special, performed the Wandering Nickel perfectly. Quentin couldn't stop staring at her small, limber brown hands. Her movements were smoother and more precise than any professionals he'd ever seen. She stopped in the middle. See here, where the second coin must go from hand to hand? You need a reverse pass, holding it like so. Here, come around so you can see. He obediently trotted around to her side of the table and stood behind her, trying not to look down her blouse. Her hands were smaller than his, but the nickel vanished between her fingers like a bird into a thicket. She did the move for him slowly, backward and forward, breaking it down. That's what I'm doing, he said. Show me. Now she was openly smiling. She grasped his wrist to stop him mid-pass. Now. Where is the second coin? He held out his hands, palm up. The coin was . . . but there was no coin. It was gone. He turned his hands over, waggled his fingers, looked on the table, in his lap, on the floor. Nothing. It had disappeared. Did she nick it while he wasn't looking? With those fast hands and that Mona Lisa smile, he couldn't quite put it past her. It is what I thought, she said, standing up. Thank you, Quentin, I will send in the next examiner. Quentin watched her go, still patting his pockets for the missing coin. For the first time in his life he couldn't tell if he'd passed or failed. The whole afternoon went like that: professors parading in through one door and out the other. It was like a dream, a long, rambling dream with no obvious meaning. There was an old man with a shaky head who fumbled in his pants pockets and threw a bunch of frayed, yellowed knotted cords on the table, then stood there with a stopwatch as Quentin untied them. A shy, pretty young woman, who looked like she was barely older than Quentin, asked him to draw a map of the House and the grounds based on what he'd seen since he'd been here. A slick fellow with a huge head and who wouldn't or couldn't stop talking challenged him to a weird variant of blitz chess. After a while you couldn't even take it seriously; it felt like it was his credulity that was being tested. A fat man with red hair and a self-important air released a tiny lizard with iridescent humming-bird wings and huge, alert eyes into the room. The man said nothing, just folded his arms and sat on the edge of the table, which creaked unhappily under his weight. For lack of a better idea Quentin tried to coax the lizard to land on his finger. It flew down and nipped a tiny chunk out of his forearm, drawing a dot of blood, then zipped away and buzzed against the window like a bumblebee. The fat man silently handed Quentin a Band-Aid, collected his lizard, and left. Finally the door closed and didn't open again. Quentin took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders. Apparently the procession had ended, though nobody bothered to say anything to Quentin. At least he had a few minutes to himself. By now the sun was setting. He couldn't see it from the exam room, but he could see a fountain, and the light reflected in the pool of the fountain was a cool burnt orange. A mist was rising up through the trees. The grounds were deserted. He rubbed his face with his hands. His head was clearing. It occurred to him, long after it probably should have, to wonder what the hell his parents were thinking. Normally they were pretty indifferent to his comings and goings, but even they had their limits. School had been out for hours now. Maybe they thought his interview had run long, though the chances that they even remembered Quentin was supposed to have had an interview were pretty small. Or if it was summer here, maybe school hadn't even started yet? The giddy haze he'd been lost in all afternoon was starting to dissipate. He wondered exactly how safe he was here. If this was a dream, he was going to have to wake up pretty soon. Through the closed door he distinctly heard the sound of somebody crying: a boy, and way too old to be crying in front of other people. A teacher was speaking to him quietly and firmly, but the boy either wouldn't or couldn't stop. He ignored it, but it was a dangerous, unmanly sound, a sound that clawed away at the outer layers of Quentin's hard-won teenage sangfroid. Underneath it there was something like fear. The voices faded as the boy was led away. Quentin

heard the Dean speaking in icy, clipped tones, trying not to sound angry. I'm really not sure I care one way or the other anymore.

Revue de presse "This is a sophisticated, subtle novel that is also magical fun. I can't imagine any lover of well-written classic fantasy ... who won't adore it" (The Times) "Stirring, complex, adventurous . . . From the life of Quentin, his slacker Park Slope Harry Potter, Grossman delivers superb coming-of-age fantasy" (Junot Diaz, author of *Drown* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*) "This gripping novel draws on the conventions of contemporary and classic fantasy novels (most obviously, those of J. K. Rowling and C. S. Lewis) in order to upend them, and tell a darkly cunning story about the power of imagination itself" (The New Yorker) "The novel's climax includes some spectacular magical battles to complement the complex emotional entanglements Grossman has deftly sketched in earlier chapters. Very dark and very scary, with no simple answers provided - fantasy for grown-ups, in other words, and very satisfying indeed" (Kirkus) "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, author of *The Ruins*)