

SPEED READING

BOOKS, NOVELS, AND STORIES TO TELL

THE MAGICIAN KING

The “in” thing in pop culture right now is to subvert children’s fantasy books and fairy tales into something darker and edgier for adults (see TV’s *Once Upon A Time* and *Game of Thrones*), and this is exactly what you have with *The Magician King*, Lev Grossman’s sequel to his 2009 bestselling novel, *The Magicians*.

In *The Magicians*, main character Quentin Coldwater gets accepted into Brakebills, a secret school for magic in upstate New York similar to Hogwarts. (That is, if Hogwarts was college-level and populated by hormonal, jaded, chain-smoking adolescents.)

By the end of that book, Quentin and a few of his classmates had discovered a way into Fillory, the Narnia-like setting for the “Fillory and Further” book series, which Quentin had been obsessed with since childhood. However, what they found out there was that the magic realm was darker and more dangerous than what they’d been led to expect, and that their adventures in Fillory could have tragic, real-life consequences.

Fast-forward to two years later, and *The Magician King* picks up the story. Quentin and his friends have since graduated from Brakebills and are seemingly living the life as High Kings and Queens of Fillory. The land is at peace and they have

everything they could ever desire... which means Quentin is bored out of his skull.

He goes on a quest to find a quest, which immediately becomes a case of “be careful what you wish for.” He finds himself dumped back into *our* world, and he must find a way to return to Fillory at all costs. Meanwhile, even if he does get back, strange things are starting to go underfoot in the magical kingdom...

The book also devotes a significant chunk to flashbacks about Quentin’s friend Julia’s past and character transformation. If Quentin and the rest of his classmates were able to formally matriculate through Brakebills, this book seeks

to explain what happens to those kids who were rejected by the system but who still want to learn magic. They can’t shake off the feeling that there’s more to the world than meets the eye, and magic becomes almost a curse to them.

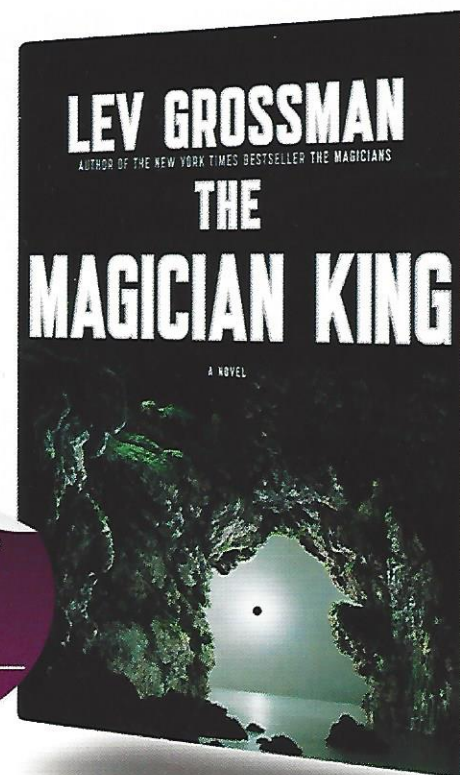
Read if you liked: George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* series



By Lev Grossman

Publisher
Viking Adult
(August 2011)

Book review by
Aisa Valenzuela



The Magician King explores the dark underbelly of the magical world, and what happens “on the streets.” “We learn the price Julia pays to receive her powers, and it is extremely dark and disturbing.

In its own twisted and sarcastic way, though, *The Magicians* series is still—at its core—a coming-of-age tale. From that viewpoint, *The Magician King* is the turning point of the trilogy, ending on a cliffhanger that hints at the possible maturation and fulfillment of Quentin’s character. (By the way, I didn’t need to check if the author had officially confirmed that there would be a sequel to this book. Given this one’s ending, I just assumed there would be.)

The Magician King is better written than its predecessor, and is even more touching and poignant in terms of the journey the characters go through. In the same vein, however, it also veers into darker and more adult territory.

Although recommended, this fantasy book—like the kingdom of Fillory itself—is not for children.

Enter at your own risk.



LEV GROSSMAN (born June 26, 1969) is an American novelist and journalist, notably the author of the novels *Warp* (1997), *Codex* (2004), *The Magicians* (2009), and *The Magician King* (2011). He is a senior writer and book critic for *TIME*.