

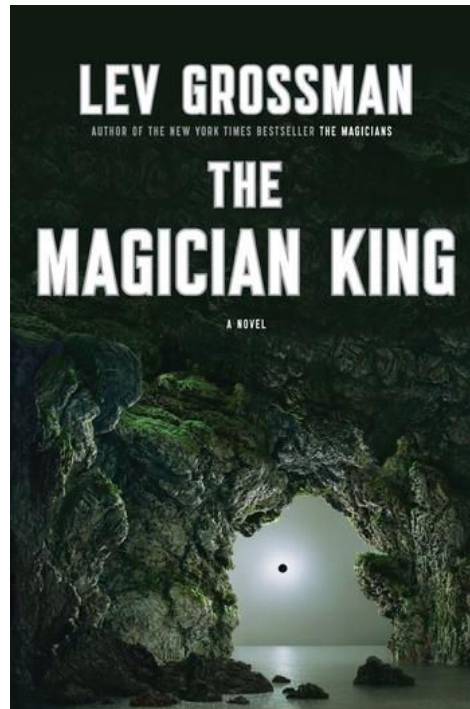
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The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review- Hot off the Presses



Cover Image of The Magician King by Lev Grossman

The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review Presents: *The Magician King* by Lev Grossman

Author bio: Lev Grossman is the author of the best-selling novels *Codex* and *The Magicians*. He graduated from Harvard with a degree in literature. Serving as the book reviewer for *Time* magazine, his journalistic work has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Wired*. *The Magician King* is the much anticipated sequel to *The Magicians*.

For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~

Review by Jackie Dawn~

At the close of 2009's *The Magicians*, author Lev Grossman literally leaves his characters hanging—they are in mid-air, on a flight back to the magic-laden land known as Fillory. For anyone who became immediately entranced by protagonist Quentin Coldwater's trials at the very magical Brakebills College (and beyond), Grossman's long-awaited sequel, *The Magician King* had one big question to answer: What would happen once they touched ground again? Luckily, Grossman has plenty lined up in this darkly-toned and detailed sequel, enough to make us wonder

just how far off Quentin really was when he surmised that "...the future was [not] a question of towering urgency right now. Quentin figured he had a pretty fair idea of what his future was like, and it wasn't much different from his present."

Although *The Magician King* takes place two years after the events in *The Magicians*, Grossman brings us back to Fillory and his cast of characters with ease and familiarity. We learn that Quentin has assumed one of Fillory's four thrones (the others are occupied by Quentin's Brakebills roommates, Eliot and Janet, as well as the elusive, rather gothic Julia- Quentin's high school crush who makes a surprising return at the end of *The Magicians*). Although Quentin has made Fillory his home, lounging around the "twenty-star hotel" that is Castle Whitespire, he has found the actuality of ruling this magical nation to be surprisingly uneventful. Readers might have expected a change in the protagonist as a result of his previous adventures, yet Quentin's demeanor at the novel's opening is rather familiar. He is miffed at his own sense of non-fulfillment and his ubiquitous boredom, not entirely unlike his attitude at the beginning of the series in *The Magicians*. He soon finds himself craving adventure, a story where he can assume the role of the hero. But Quentin quickly picks up on what seems to be a central theme of the events for all of the characters in *The Magician King* - be careful what you wish for.

We learn that although it is still beautiful and simultaneously dangerous, there is an underlying "wrongness" in Fillory. The magic has begun to fade unexpectedly, leaving room for "death and destruction," as foretold by the early appearance of Fillory's Seeing Hare. It is around this point that the promise of a very long tale about to unfold is made; a tale that delves into aspects of the magical origin and the metaphysical borders of Fillory. Fans of the series won't be disappointed by what Grossman has ambitiously set about to do in this sequel. For starters, there is literally an entire world that has still gone unexplored. The mere discovery of the once-fictionalized, yet very real Fillory becomes overwhelmingly delightful at the close of *The Magicians*, leaving an unspoken expectation to reveal more of this magical, yet dark world's secrets in the follow-up. Secondly, Grossman has left a bevy of familiar characters who've been keeping themselves busy in the two years since *The Magicians* end. Grossman is skillfully adept at bringing readers up to speed, efficiently filling in the blanks and giving updates on all of the important players. Although we are treated to appearances by all of the usual suspects (yes, even Penny shows up at one point), the anticipation of the return of Alice goes unanswered. Before we are able to be disheartened by this absence, we are easily distracted and subsequently engulfed by what is revealed about Julia's mysterious return.

Grossman's dual storytelling is magnetic as his chapters alternate between the present day Fillorian-and-beyond adventure and Julia's past, beginning just around the time she took (and ultimately failed) the Brakebills entrance exam. A genuinely interesting parallel is created when the readers remember Quentin, Eliot and the rest of the Brakebills team's formally structured, intense and privileged magical education compared with Julia's street-cred. We begin to see that magically speaking, Julia's skills surpass those of the Brakebills alumni, and that she has learned more concentrated (and perhaps more valuable) self-motivation and determination in a grittier, more dangerously combative and much less comfortable kind of atmosphere.

Grossman's taking on of this epic story that literally almost swallows his entire cast, clearly does not intimidate his strong,

effective writing style. Devoted readers will pick up on what seem like small details and descriptions which Grossman consistently and cleverly returns to. Quentin is still on-par with his snarky quips and the narrative voice draws chuckles on more than a few occasions with sarcastic commentary. As usual, Grossman adds plenty of sensory description that lends to the story's vibrancy without overpowering the text. It is to the immense pleasure and relief of the reader to see that Grossman has not lost the unique story-telling style that strengthened and distinguished his first novel.

In terms of plot, *The Magician King* hits the ground running—the first two chapters are filled with enough action and creepiness to immediately hook even the most sequel-skeptical. Before we realize it, Quentin is off again on another quest- except this time, he gets to actually use his magical skills instead of simply training to better them. As readers, we are privy to every single step of this magical journey, regardless of whether it might seem trivial or unimportant when compared to the larger scheme of things. We see later how each detail has a rhyme and a reason.

While the story never really retreats to the dull (spare for perhaps one section when Grossman unnecessarily delves into a highly analytical math game Julia finds solace in), some chapters seem to be made up, at first glance, of nothing more than page-filler action. In moments of feet-kicking impatience, we start asking questions: Why are all these portals here and why do we have to jump through them all? Why is it so important to hear all the details about the online group of nerds Julia finds camaraderie in? What is the point of the awesome scene where Quentin gets pulled beneath the canals in Venice by an ancient magical dragon? How many riddles do we really have to ponder before it all starts coming together?

And then, in an almost sneaky manner, it all does.

Grossman's chapter-hopping explanation and dissection of Julia's life has been not only been engrossing, but finally we understand how its place in the novel is so relevant to the events of the story.

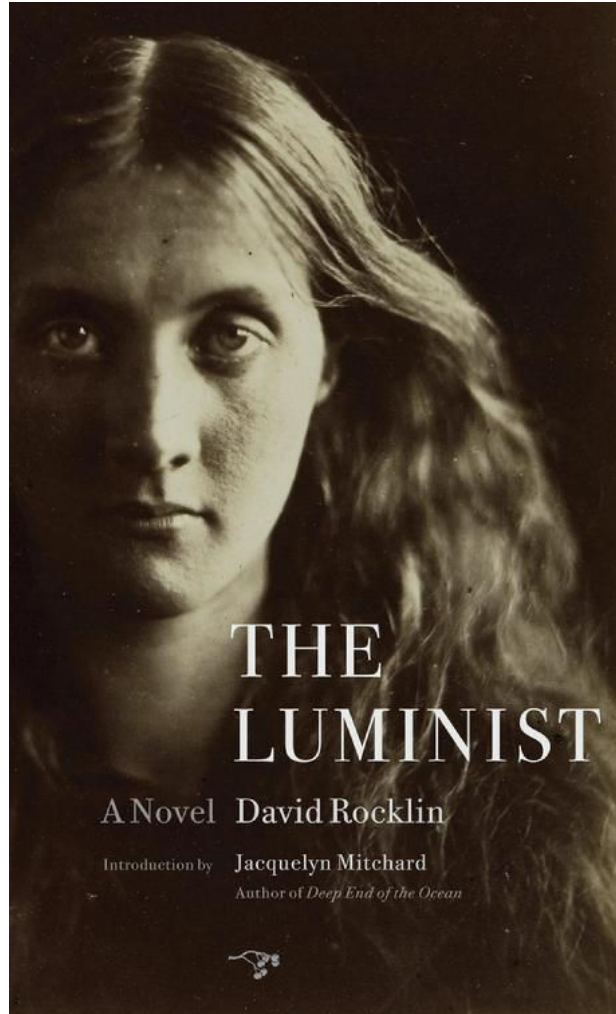
The climax of the novel becomes a character itself—it comes in quietly through a back door, shrouded in mystery and uncertainty only to explode into a melee of surprise, whim, disappointment and an unbelievable amount of absolute horror. And just when we think we might recover, Grossman brings round two, leaving the reader to compare the parallels between the climax of Julia's story and the climax of Quentin's and how their stories can possibly continue on now after all that's happened. According to his website, Grossman has plans for a third installment in the series. In this second part of the epic, he has certainly provided enough foundations for new material to be built on.

As a sequel, *The Magician King* has triumphed in the way that Grossman has taken all of his familiar cast and placed them cohesively in a new story—one that has enough chops to stand alone, not requiring the use of the first novel's major occurrences as a crutch to lean its plot on. If a major component of the well-written novel is the ability to show an expansive scope of character development, then *The Magician King* is a success in yet another way—Quentin has transformed so dramatically, that the brooding, moody teenager he was is literally a whole world apart from him. His evolution of character is so complete that one wonders whether an entirely new story awaits him...

Excerpt from The Magician King



[Excerpt from The Magician King by Lev Grossman- Reprinted by arrangement with Viking, a member of Penguin Group \(USA\) Inc., from The Magician King by Lev Grossman. Copyright © 2011 by Lev Grossman.](#)



Cover Image of The Luminist by David Rocklin

The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review Presents: *The Luminist* by David Rocklin

Author bio: David Rocklin holds a degree in Literature from Indiana University. After attending law school, he worked as an in-house attorney and continues to serve as a mediator. This is his first novel.

For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~

Review by Nicole M. Bouchard~

Nearly all great stories begin with a change- be it an alteration in routine, a triumph, a loss, a parting, a visit or a defeat. At the beginning of *The Luminist*, we are powerfully confronted with a woman's loss which will shape the way she sees the outer world- "...the world she knew, made of lost children and the lights that illuminated the way back to them", herself and the confines of time. This novel, set amidst the discord of 19th century Ceylon,

is in itself a portrait we are privy to as though we are watching it unfold from the removed distance of a camera lens. From a subtle vantage point, we are observers for much of the novel until, quite unexpectedly, we realize that if our aim, like a photographer was to capture the essence of our subject, that the subject has instead bewitchingly captured us. A well-researched, artfully descriptive novel, this debut of Rocklin's stands apart with distinguished authenticity.

British colonial woman Catherine Colebrook and Elgius, the Tamil boy she takes in as an apprentice, are on a quest to merge science, faith and art all for the purpose of preserving the precious, illusive 'moment'. Seen as a controversial rebuttal to religion, Catherine's pursuit of photography brings into question her moral standing as a wife, mother and member of British society. It is in the unlikely place of Elgius' heart that she finds understanding as they both have suffered grief over departed loved ones and so wish to still time to preserve and immortalize that which they hold dear. As Ceylon crumbles around them due to the opposing pressures of the British and the harshly oppressed natives, the theme of preservation becomes increasingly significant as though a race to freeze the beauty of what once was has begun.

Loosely based on the life and work of Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Luminist* brings history alive with its intimate portrayals of the threaded web of relationships between the families and cultures of its principal characters. Both embittered by their losses, Catherine and Elgius have a dark, quiet peace about them that is at once both hungry for more and numb in disillusionment. It would seem that in letting her work take precedence, Catherine has allowed her grief to consume her to the point of filtering out her family. For Elgius, to have to turn his back on his Tamil roots and serve a British household, the head of which has been instrumental- despite his best intentions- in the undoing of native Ceylon, seems like a displacement of his heritage and birthright. Yet what Catherine and Elgius discover is that there are seldom clearly discernible sides of black and white to such issues and instead they seek the silver, the nitrate crystals- the gray area- of the chemicals and images that allow them to hold what's left of the light in their lives. It is their friendship that retains purity as both sides fall to extremes within their closest circles.

Perception is another of the strong themes in the novel, coming into play literally and figuratively through their work and external circumstances beyond the gates of Dimbola. As Catherine begins to emerge in her chosen profession, subjects for her art arrive on the doorstep of the Holland House cottage to be captured not as they ought to be to appease societal expectations but as they truly are or want to be, outside of the frame. Even Elgius' burgeoning young romance with Catherine's eldest child, Julia, is captured in an image that to an outsider would be viewed as unfitting and obscene between a Tamil boy and a British girl yet is actually bathed in truth and innocence. The story warns that not all things last but reassures also that happiness can return, what was lost can be found and love, above all, remains.

Hailed by Jacqueline Mitchard as a novel that "recalls *Out of Africa*", *The Luminist* uses its mix of dark and light to burn an image into our minds that is sure to remain. In an excerpt from a letter Catherine writes to her friend and mentor John Holland, the sentiment of the novel is expressed as such: "Imagine, arresting beauty at the very moment beauty comes into being and passes out of this world. Imagine if life could be held still." It is the book that performs this art in "arresting beauty" and paying tribute to history as it very tenderly holds that time of life still in the arms of its pages.

Excerpt from The Luminist



[Excerpt from The Luminist by David Rocklin](#)

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