

The Magician King Study Guide

The Magician King by Lev Grossman

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Plot Summary

“The Magician King” is a young adult fantasy novel by Lev Grossman, is the second part of his “Magician” trilogy, and follows the continuing adventures of Quentin Coldwater as one of the four monarchs of the magical land of Fillory. Quentin, Julia, Janet, and Eliot rule Fillory fairly and justly, and are beloved by the people and creatures of the land. However, during a recreational hunt to capture the Seeing Hare, a prophetic Unique Beast, the Hare predicts death and despair to come, and the Master of the Hunt, Jollyby, drops dead. Quentin and the others go into council in the attempt to determine what may have happened – but have no satisfactory answers.

While discussing other business, they learn that Outer Island has not paid taxes in years, prompting Quentin and Julia to see to find out way. After a long voyage at sea aboard the Muntjac, Quentin and Julia arrive at Outer Island to learn that taxes have not been paid in years because the mainland has not been heard from in years, and the taxes are then promptly paid. After learning about seven magical golden keys, Quentin decides on an adventure to find one which opens a portal – and puts Quentin and Julia back on Earth.

Back on Earth, Quentin and Julia seek out Josh, who now lives in Venice, Italy, for he was last in possession of the magic button that brought them to Fillory in the first place. Josh reveals he has sold the button to a dragon for \$250-million. Quentin seeks out the dragon, who will not return the button, but instead tells Quentin that heroes must be prepared to lose everything. The dragon goes on to explain that the old gods are returning for what is theirs, and the first door to Fillory is still open. Quentin, Julia, Josh, and Poppy (a dragon expert and friend of Josh’s) then travel to Cornwall, England, to the Chatwin home where the Chatwin children first accessed Fillory in 1917. There, Quentin, Julia, Josh, and Poppy are magically taken back to Fillory, where they join Eliot on his journey to collect the seven keys, as instructed by the Unique Beasts of Fillory.

It is ultimately revealed to Quentin and Julia in the Neitherlands by Penny that the old gods are reworking existence so that their magic cannot be accessed at all. Magic will cease to exist for people who practice it, and entire worlds based on magic – like Fillory – will completely disappear. Penny reveals that the people who first accessed the magical realm created an emergency back door to save magic should it ever be compromised. The door requires the seven golden keys. Penny explains that he, as well as the Neitherlands Order to which he belongs, will battle and delay the gods with the help of all the dragons of Earth to buy time for Quentin to save the day.

With all seven keys in hand, Quentin, Eliot, Julia, Poppy, and the others reach the extent of the world of Fillory, and there find a door with seven keyholes. Only a few decide to go through, including Quentin and Julia. Quentin is denied access for he does not have a passport, and Julia is denied access for she is the reason the gods have returned to reclaim their magic.



For years, Julia and her rogue magician friends sought to summon a goddess to tap into higher levels of magic. The result was the calling of a trickster fox god that butchered nearly all of Julia's friends, and raped Julia, causing her to fill up with magic, and later be fully transformed into a demigoddess by the goddess she was originally hoping to call. It is revealed that summoning any god summons them all – who realized others had tapped into their magical realm, and now seek to close it. Quentin takes all the blame for what Julia has done, for it was he who first confirmed the existence of magic to Julia years ago. Julia is then able to pass through the door. Quentin is then ejected from Fillory, even though he has helped to save it.



Book I: Chapter 1 – 6

Summary

Chapter 1 – King Quentin, Queen Julia, King Eliot, and Queen Janet – the four rulers of the magical land of Fillory – meet up. They are hunting the Seeing Hare, one of the twelve Unique Beasts of Fillory, who can predict the future, but hasn't been seen in centuries. Quentin thinks about his time in Fillory as a King, doing his best to do good in honor of his old girlfriend, Alice, who sacrificed her life for him. Quentin also thinks about Julia, who is the only one of the four who has not had a traditional Brakebills Magic College education, as she is self-taught. Quentin, Julia, Eliot and Janet chase the Hare into the clock-trees in the woods, which keep perfect time. They find a particularly large enchanted broken clock-tree, never before noticed. Quentin considers going after the Hare, but responsibly decides against it. Jollyby, Master of the Hunt, approaches a moment later, having caught the Hare. When asked for the future, the Hare predicts death and despair, and Jollyby drops dead.

Chapter 2 – Quentin, Eliot, Janet, and Julia meet at Castle Whitespire to discuss Jollyby's death. The Fenwick family, rivals for political power, are suspected, as are the Lorian people to the north. The four rulers worry about an unexplained death in Fillory, and how it will affect the 20,000 residents, half of them being human. They also discuss the Outer Island, which hasn't paid taxes in years. Quentin agrees to travel there to see what is going on. Eliot later recounts to Quentin how, after their last experience in Fillory, everyone else in the group went their separate ways. Eliot also cautions Quentin about falling in love with Julia, who appears to be attempting to use magic to summon something she has lost.

Chapter 3 – Admiral Lacker brings Quentin and Julia to the waterfront to inspect ships for the passage to Outer Island. They agree on a number of ships to take, including the broken-down Muntjac, which is put in for repairs. Quentin also hosts a tournament to discover the best swordsman in Fillory. There are two finalists – a woman named Aral and a man named Bingle. Bingle wins and is added to the mission. Quentin later familiarizes himself with Outer Island – which is 477 nautical miles away, according to 16-year-old Benedict Fenwick, an assistant cartographer. Benedict explains that Outer Island is supposed to be the location of the key that winds up the whole world. Quentin then makes Benedict a part of the mission, which leaves soon after.

Chapter 4 – Julia, like Quentin, tested at Brakebills. Her entrance to the magical grounds of the campus came through the library's elevator.

Chapter 5 – The Muntjac is at sea. The Outer Island is in a tropical zone, and takes three days to reach. There, they meet Elaine, the Customs Agent, and her daughter, Eleanor, and have dinner at the embassy. Elaine reveals that Outer Island hasn't sent taxes because they haven't heard from the mainland in years. Elaine also points out that the Outer Island is the edge of the Fillory Empire, and wonders if it is enough for



Quentin. Quentin is not sure. Elaine also explains the golden key is on After Island. The next morning, Elaine gives Quentin a book called “The Seven Golden Keys”. Eleanor gives Quentin Fillory passports she has drawn, in case Quentin decides to leave Fillory. Quentin thanks her, and prepares for the voyage home.

Chapter 6 – Julia remembers Quentin’s first break at home from Brakebills – and knew there was something changed about him. She realized it was Brakebills – and the real world no longer appealed to her. Julia knew she would enter the world of magic at any cost.

Analysis

“The Magician King” is a young adult fantasy novel by Lev Grossman which follows the continuing adventures of Quentin Coldwater as one of the four monarchs of the magical land of Fillory. When the novel begins, the reader can easily identify themes of friendship and magic. Quentin, who has been through tremendous difficulties and terrifying adventures with Janet, Eliot, and Julia, now does his best to enjoy being both friend and king – but his heart is still restless for something else, for something more. This leads to the hunt for the Seeing Hare. The reader should here note that the excursion to capture the Seeing Hare – a small journey in and of itself – is a precursor for a larger journey to come, which will itself inform the theme of journeys.

The journey for the seeing Hare is important here for two reasons. First, it is something done among friends, a demonstration of their friendship and loyalty toward one another, and in a sense of community and belonging. Secondly, the journey to find the Seeing Hare – no matter how small a journey it is – reinforces the literary concept of journeys being about more than merely the physical destination or reason for the trip. There is something deeper to be learned. In this case, the journey to capture the Seeing Hare reveals a dark omen. The larger journey signaled by the journey to catch the Seeing Hare appears simple at first – to reach the Outer Island to see about unpaid taxes. But as observed with the Seeing Hare incident, a journey is not merely a trip.

The theme of magic is also especially strong in the early part of the novel. The entire situation – of being kings and queens in a magical land called Fillory – is an overarching form of magic itself, for it is only through magic that a place like Fillory exists at all. Quentin, Julia, Janet, and Eliot themselves are classically-trained magicians, having trained at Brakebills magic college in upstate New York. They likewise rely on magic in their everyday lives in Fillory, and use magic to their advantage as needs be. Fillory itself is full of magical creatures, such as the Seeing Hare and the other Unique Beasts of Fillory.

In addition to the darkness around the death of Jollyby, the reader should also take pause to note another ominous statement – this one from Eliot. Eliot is able to see clearly that Julia has lost something. What it is that she has lost is not known, but the fact that she is looking for it is enough to cause Eliot to caution Quentin against falling in love with her. As the novel unfolds, short chapters are wholly devoted to Julia’s own



past, signaling that Julia's own history will be important in the future. The reader should also pay attention to the passports given to Quentin – a child's gift, seemingly simple and unassuming, but nothing is ever what it seems in the magical world.

Discussion Question 1

Why are Quentin and the others seeking the Seeing Hare? What does the Hare reveal? How is this prophesy handled? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Quentin travel to Outer Island in the first place? What do you believe this portends?

Discussion Question 3

According to legend and lore, what is Outer Island supposed to be home to? Does Quentin take this claim seriously? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

sepulchral, affronted, discreet, inscrutable, etiquette, benign, prerogative, obsolete, equanimity, incarnation, sentient



Book I: Chapter 7 – Book II: Chapter 12

Summary

Chapter 7 – On the voyage home, Benedict does not warm up any toward Quentin as Quentin hopes will happen. He asks Benedict how his field experience in mapmaking has been. Benedict explains it is hard, difficult work that is mathematically imprecise. He observes a map that Benedict says he has copied from the embassy, which shows After Island in the Eastern Ocean. Quentin orders the ship to change course for After Island. Quentin and Julia talk that evening. She feels as if Quentin had abandoned her in the real world. She explains she feels less like herself every day, and that being away from Fillory makes her remember things, though she does not want to return to the real world. She explains that everything that happened to her will one day be revealed to Quentin, but he must earn it. Quentin also considers “The Seven Golden Keys”, a fairy tale about a widower, his daughter, and a witch who kidnaps her and imprisons her in a silver castle that needs a golden key. He struggles for years to find the key to free his daughter, only to have his daughter not recognize him. He never uses the key again.

Chapter 8 – Quentin asks for fighting lessons from Bingle, who obliges. Bingle tells Quentin he does not expect to see Fillory again. The Muntjac later lands at After Island. Inquiring about the golden key, Quentin is directed by locals to go down the road. In the local chapel, they find the golden key. Julia can sense old magic resonating from it. Quentin uses the key to open a door in the air, which leads him to his parents' house in Chesterton, Massachusetts.

Chapter 9 – Quentin cannot understand why he is no longer in Fillory. Julia panics. The two break into a blue muscle car which they drive to Brakebills. But in order to gain access to the school, they follow Alice's old route. Once at Brakebills, they meet with Dean Henry Fogg. Quentin asks about interdimensional travel, but Fogg says it is more theoretical than practical. Fogg then strongly warns Quentin not to stir up trouble, and Quentin is dangerous thinking he knows better than everyone else.

Chapter 10 – Julia reflects on her time after being rejected from Brakebills. She searched everywhere for months for anything she could find about magic, and found an old set of spells on an old archive from an old Bulletin Board System (BBS) online from Kansas City, which she used to perform real magic for the first time.

Chapter 11 – Back in Chestertown, Julia tells Quentin that what he learned at Brakebills is not real magic. She decides to bring Quentin to a safe house where magicians not a part of the Brakebills world practice magic on their own in a self-ruled sort of school. There, a magician named Alex explains that, in order to stay, Quentin must perform magic, which he does – amazing everyone except Alex. Julia is among the most powerful magicians. From there, they take a portal to Richmond, Virginia. There, Julia argues with Warren, a woodland spirit, who sends them to Venice, Italy.



Chapter 12 – Julia reflects on trying to find Quentin years before, after being rejected from Brakebills and learning magic on her own. She found it unfair that Quentin had it so easy, while she had it so hard with the magical world.

Analysis

On the journey back from Outer Island, Quentin reads the story “The Seven Golden Keys”, which from all appearances is nothing more than a mere child’s fairy tale. Quentin – stunningly so to the reader, especially after everything Quentin has been through and experienced – dismisses it as fiction, as not a part of reality. The reader, however, knows better. It is clearly not an accident that Quentin – a King – has been given a book about golden keys. As Quentin comes to discover, there are magical golden keys, and yet he still dismisses the rest of the story as fantasy.

When Quentin and Julia use the golden key, they are transported back to Earth – a nearly traumatic experience for them both, for neither had ever anticipated returning to the real world. For Julia, the experience is especially difficult to handle. While she doesn’t explicitly state why, the reader is able to garner why based on her history as it continues to unfold.

What she has come to want most – becoming a part of the magical world – was the one thing denied to her like nothing else. Having worked her way to safe houses in an underground world of magic, honing her magic along the way, and having (though as yet unrevealed how) clawed her way into a world of magic, to be returned to Earth is disenchanting at the very least.

The theme of friendship can also be seen in this section of the novel once more, as Quentin and Julia must work together – and rely on each other – to seek to return to Fillory. This involves including one another in their own pasts, sometimes a very difficult thing to do, which underscores their loyalty toward one another. Quentin brings Julia to Brakebills to see Dean Fogg, and Julia brings Quentin into the underworld of magic.

The reader should also note here that there are two journeys underway –neither of which are as patently simple as they first appear. While a golden key has been found by Quentin and Julia, six more remain, and will obviously be sought after sooner or later. But first comes the more pressing journey, which is the return to Fillory. Quentin and Julia find themselves in a place of great difficulty as they have no clue how to return, and can rely on only Julia’s integration with the magic underground.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Quentin not take seriously the story of “The Seven Golden Keys”? Even when he discovers there are actually golden keys, he does not take the story around them seriously. Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why is the return to Earth so traumatic for Julia? Does Quentin recognize this as such? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the friendship between Quentin and Julia manifest itself as they begin their journey to return to Fillory? How does their friendship help them?

Vocabulary

conspicuously, sonorously, patina, diffuse, insubstantial, imperturbable, prodigal son, becalmed,



Book II: Chapter 13 – Book III: Chapter 19

Summary

Chapter 13 – In Venice, Quentin and Julia head for the Dorsoduro neighborhood, a block away from the Grand Canal, as directed by Warren. There, they meet up with Josh, who lives in a magnificent home. Josh explains that after their original Fillory invention, he took the magic button and explored the Neitherlands to find his own Fillory, such as Middle Earth from “The Lord of the Rings”. He explains that he visited dozens and dozens of different worlds, only to discover the Neitherlands was “busted”, with half the buildings being ruined, and the air full of book pages. Josh then reveals he sold the magic button to buy the palazzo in which he now lives.

Chapter 14 – Josh explains he sold the magic button to a dragon by way of a wealthy Venetian midget for \$250-million. The next day, Quentin and Julia meet with Poppy, a thin Australian girl who has knowledge of dragons. She explains dragons can be contacted by jumping in their rivers at noticeable places. That night, the four of them go to the Accademia Bridge, where Quentin and Poppy go into the canal. There, Quentin meets the dragon, and asks for the return of the button. The dragon refuses, and tells Quentin that Quentin longs to be a hero – and a hero must be prepared to lose. The dragon explains the old gods are returning to claim what is theirs, that the Neitherlands are closed, and that the first door is still open.

Chapter 15 – Julia reflects on how she almost walked away from magic, from what she believed should have been her destiny. She remembers becoming a part of the Free Trader Beowulf BBS, how it gave her a sense of belonging. Yet a longing for magic appeared, and she returned to magic.

Chapter 16 – Julia, discussing things with Quentin, Josh, and Poppy, explains the first door must mean the Chatwin children’s aunt’s house in Cornwall, England – through the clock in the back hall. In 1917, with their father away at war in Europe, the Chatwin children visited their Aunt Maude, met Christopher Plover (who would later write the Fillory novels), and went to Fillory. In each novel in the series, the children access Fillory in different ways – such as climbing trees and riding bikes. Poppy is in disbelief, but goes along as well to the town of Fowey in Cornwall, from which they set out for the Chatwin house. Julia is upbeat and happy about it.

At the house, they discover a party of some sort going on, and they blend in to discover the clock. Josh says he isn’t going. Nothing happens. A small boy named Thomas appears and explains Quentin is doing it wrong, and that the clock needs to be taken in for repairs. They then play card games and board games with Thomas, and while sitting on his rocket-shaped bed, return to the oceans of Fillory.



Chapter 17 – Quentin, Julia, Poppy, and Josh are amazed at the approach of the Muntjac. Eliot is aboard, and is thrilled to see them. He tells them they have been gone for one year and one day in Fillory time, though it was only three days in Earth time. Eliot explains they are going on an adventure, rather than back to Fillory. He explains he survived an assassination attempt, had a clock-tree grow in the throne room, and had his bathroom door open into the forest – all signs of being called on a quest to find the Seven Golden Keys by the Seeing Hare, the Utter Newt, the Kind Wolf, and all the other Unique Beasts. With only a Golden Ring to go on, Eliot is underway with his quest. Also along for the journey is Benedict. Five of the keys have been found – the product of riddles and fights to claim them.

Chapter 18 – Julia remembers how her favorite safe house was the in Bed-Stuy on Throop Avenue. She spent all the time she could there. She learned all sorts of magic, and met all kinds of people. She learned quickly, and traveled around from house to house, ultimately heading to Murs, France, where she meets a member of the Free Traders BBS, Pouncy.

Chapter 19 – The Muntjac continues on its quest. Bingle trains Benedict in the art of combat. Poppy tells Quentin that Benedict looks up to him like a father-figure. Quentin and Eliot realize that Fillory must be in danger, for between the quest, the Neitherlands breaking down, and the dragon seeking the magic button, something is wrong. They find an island where Ember the Ram now lives. Ember says he knows where all the keys are, but must leave it to others to collect them due to Deeper Magic at work. Fillory, he explains, needs a hero – and the Seven Keys. Ember then vanishes.

Quentin is then attacked by an unknown soldier, who nearly kills him, but whom Quentin knocks out with a fainting spell. Quentin then takes on another man on the beach, and then approaches a castle, where he continues to battle other soldiers, along with Poppy, Eliot, Bingle, and Benedict, who arrive to help. Quentin then meets the living corpse of the father from the story “The Seven Golden Keys”. The father gives Quentin his key, and then dies, for the key has kept the father alive. There is one more key to go. Quentin then learns that Benedict has been killed in the fight.

Analysis

The journey to return to Fillory continues – and becomes more complex – in this section of the novel. Quentin and Julia seek out Josh, who is now living in Venice. There, Josh reveals that he has sold the magical button to a dragon living in the Grand Canal for the staggering sum of \$250-million. What the dragon wants with the button is never revealed, and the dragon refuses to return the button. However, the reader should pay careful attention to the theme of journey, here –in the fact that what matters is not necessarily the destination, but what is learned along the way.

The dragon, conversing with Quentin, reveals two very important things to him. First, the dragon understands that Quentin longs to be a hero. Heroes are not noted for their abilities to have won anything, but their having lost everything, the dragon explains. It is



not something that Quentin has previously considered, though he denies the fact that he has anything left to lose (and here, the reader will reflect on the self-sacrifice of Alice in the previous novel). Secondly, the dragon reveals that the first way is still open to return to Fillory, meaning the Chatwin House.

It is important to note here that Quentin has learned two things, without truly realizing them yet. First, heroism is more about winning. It is also about losing. Quentin assumes he has lost everything he possibly can, but this is clearly not the case, as Quentin is not a hero yet. Secondly, Quentin understands at face value that there is a first door into Fillory, into the world of magic. But where there is the first of something, at some point, there is also the last of something. There must be a last door into the magical realm beyond Earth – but this is not something that Quentin, or any of the others, even bothers to consider.

Returning to Fillory, Quentin and Julia immediately become a part of the journey to claim the remaining golden keys, a quest undertaken by Eliot at the behest of the Unique Beasts. Only later in the assault on the castle on what will become Benedict Island does Quentin finally learn that the fairytale of “The Seven Golden Keys” is not a fairy tale, but a true story retold for children. Quentin is confronted by the living corpse of the father of the girl, kept alive only by the magic of the key. Without the key, the father dies.

The reader should remember here again that journeys are not about what is gained, but what is learned – and that the heroes of journeys must be willing to lose something important. The girl’s father journeyed for years to find the keys to free his daughter – only to have her daughter not recognize him, and not want to stay around to recognize him. He is her unsung hero. In freeing her, and ending his journey to free her, he loses everything: his daughter. Though heartbroken, the father’s journey helped to teach him just how deeply his love for his daughter ran, and how he was willing to lose everything to gain just one thing – her freedom. As such, he in turn freely gives the key to Quentin, which has essentially become like a curse to his own life.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Quentin and the father from “The Seven Golden Keys”. In what ways are they similar? How are they different? What has the father learned that Quentin has not yet learned? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How do Quentin and Julia return to Fillory? Why do Josh and Poppy come with them?



Discussion Question 3

Why has Eliot undertaken the quest to find all seven golden keys? Does he have any idea why the keys must be found? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

debauched, factoid, invulnerable, malodorous, disquisition, indigenous, quintessentially, hagiography, brazen, euphoric, lolling, arcane, imperialist, prodigious, surmounted, colossal, quibble



Book III: Chapter 20 – Book IV: Chapter 23

Summary

Chapter 20 – Julia recalls how thrilled she was to be at the house in Murs, which was elite among safe houses. There, she continued to hone her magic with Iris, Pouncey, and the others, most of them being members of the Free Traders BBS. When she has learned all she could, she became a part of the mission to tap into even more powerful magic.

Chapter 21 – As the Muntjac gets underway, Quentin names the island they leave, Benedict Island, in honor of the slain Benedict. It causes him to sadly reflect on the death of Alice. He invites Poppy to return to Fillory after the journey is completed, but Poppy wants to return to Earth. While trying to return to Earth, Poppy ends up in the Neithlands, and Quentin goes with her. It is freezing cold, and they decide to head to the Earth fountain, but it is frozen. They find someone inside a nearby building, floating among stacks of books.

Chapter 22 – The person they find in a building is Penny. He is now a part of a monk-like order dedicated to watching over the Neitherlands. Penny explains that Dean Fogg always believed magic was a system that humans had access to, rather than created and controlled. While God has created everything, other gods created the world of magic, specifically. The gods, long absent, are returning to take back the magic from people. Looking down through a covered square in the ground, a silvery god can be seen at work, rewiring the world.

The gods do not have the power to make mistakes, Penny explains - only mortals do. Penny does not know, however, what triggered the return of the gods and their taking back of magic. Worlds based wholly on magic – like Fillory – will simply cease to exist. However, the hackers who first accessed the magical world created a back door to get back in if the need ever arose. Seven golden keys are needed for this. Quentin reveals they have six, having been appointed by Ember to find them all. Meanwhile, Penny, the Order, and their allies – dragons from all over the world – are going to delay the gods.

Chapter 23 – Julia remembers seeking a way to tap into higher magic – Project Ganymede. Pouncey, and the others, wanted to seek out the gods of magic – and do the magic they did. They sought out Earth-bound magical creatures like fairies and lycanthropes. They then came across the tarasque, a dragon-like creature, which admitted to being in the lower ranks of the magical hierarchy, who then sent them on to find an old hermit, Amadour, who told them how to call out a goddess, whom they named Our Lady Underground.



Analysis

In this section of the novel, much of the puzzle of the mystery behind the golden keys is put together – from why the seven golden keys are being collected, to what Penny has been up to since the first book of the trilogy, to why the dragon needed the magical button (and was willing to pay so steep a price for it). The gods have realized their realm of magic has been infringed upon while they were away, and now they mean to take it back by restructuring the world. Magicians on Earth will find themselves without magic. Places like Brakebills will no longer have a purpose. Worlds like Fillory will cease to exist altogether. It is a terrifying prospect.

The reader will here recall something very important the dragon said to Quentin while in the Grand Canal. The dragon referred to the Chatwin House as being the first door to the world of Fillory. The emergency back door created by the first people to hack into the magic system, as described by Penny, is the last door. It is through that last door that the magical world will be saved.

The door itself requires the seven golden keys. It is now clear why the Unique Beasts of Fillory tasked Eliot with the quest to find all seven golden keys. The Grand Canal dragon likewise has a role in things: as an ally of the Order, and as a being whose own existence depends upon magic, the dragon has obtained the magical button in order to be able to travel to the Neatherlands with other dragons to delay the gods.

The reader will also note how friendship matters so much here as Quentin embarks upon the quest to recover all of the golden keys – and how Poppy, so recently arrived, throws in her lot with everyone as well. Penny likewise remains friends with Quentin, so he is relatively forthcoming about everything that is transpiring with the gods and their reworking of the world structures. Part of the reason why Quentin is so determined to save the magical world is not merely because he inhabits part of that world, but because so do his friends.

At the same time as all this occurs, the reader also continues to learn about Julia's past. Having fallen in with some elite underground magicians, Julia and her group sought ways of contacting the gods in an attempt to tap into higher orders of magic. The reader begins to suspect that the two are perhaps somehow related, as Penny previously explains that the gods have decided to shut down access to magic for some unknown reason. Something has stirred them –or, perhaps, someone – and this something is yet to be revealed.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the Unique Beasts of Fillory send Eliot on a mission to obtain the seven golden keys? What purpose do the keys themselves serve?



Discussion Question 2

Explain the history behind the seven golden keys, including why they were originally created. Do the old gods know about their existence? Why do you believe this is so?

Discussion Question 3

If the gods do not have the power to make mistakes, as Penny explains, then why do you believe their world of magic was tapped into? If you believe this was not a mistake, why do you believe the gods are only now restructuring the world to seal it off from the magical realm?

Vocabulary

intolerable, menagerie, eccentricity, simultaneously, profundity, barnstorming, fastidiously, hubristic, austerity



Book IV: Chapter 24 – Book IV: Chapter 26

Summary

Chapter 24 – The Muntjac continues its journey to find the final golden key. Quentin visits with Abigail, a sloth, below deck. She is the representative of the Fillory animal kingdom on the voyage. Abigail is a psychopomp, and can guide Quentin to the Fillory underworld to see Benedict to offer some comfort, for Benedict is unhappy with how he died. Consulting the others, only Poppy is hesitant about Quentin going, but this does not stop him. Julia goes with Quentin (who hands in his passport, the one made by Eleanor) to meet Benedict, but Benedict can only see Quentin, who assures Benedict he was important to the mission.

Benedict hands them the missing golden key, having found it himself, and wanting to return it at the end to be a hero. Quentin also sees Martin Chatwick, aged 13, who mockingly says that Quentin's girlfriend, Alice, isn't around to save him this time. Before Julia can attack Martin, Our Lady Underground arrives to stop the fray, and to change Julia, making her partially divine. She is now a dryad. She and Quentin are then returned to Fillory.

Chapter 25 – Julia remembers how she, Pouncy, Failstaff, Asmodeus, and the other members at Murs traveled to the Mediterranean for a last vacation. Pouncy revealed he was suicidal as a child, and hoped that finding Our Lady Underground meant she could take him to Heaven. Back in Murs, they prepared to invoke Our Lady Underground based on Amadour's instructions, but Julia had second thoughts about it all: she never wanted to become a goddess, only human. Instead of Our Lady, they summoned the trickster beast Reynard the Fox. Reynard then proceeded to kill Failstaff, and everyone else in the Murs house except Pouncy, Asmodeus, and Julia. Reynard explains that when one god is called, all gods are called. Pouncy is then taken, and Reynard rapes Julia. In the process, he transfers magic to her, but takes something away as well. Julia knows something bad has happened in general, and she takes off into the sky in flight.

Chapter 26 – The goddess brings Quentin and Julia back to the Muntjac. Julia is transformed beautifully. She explains to Quentin she is finally who she was meant to become –a demi-goddess –and that she almost lost faith in the goddess herself, but Julia learned she had to take what had been done to her and use it to make herself into who she really wanted to be. Because of that, she can summon the goddess. Julia then reveals everything to Quentin as the Muntjac continues its journey, with Julia giving the ship magical powers to alter itself on the water as it becomes more and more shallow. Eventually, the water is too shallow, and everyone disembarks.

After walking for more than an hour, they find a brick wall ten feet high on a thin beach which stretches off into the horizon in both directions. In the wall is a door with seven



keyholes. At the door are Elaine and her father. Elaine is holding the Seeing Hare. The door is opened successfully. Only Bingle, Abigail the Sloth, Quentin, and Julia move to go through, but Quentin and Julia are refused entry – Quentin because he does not have his passport, and Julia because she helped to summon the gods. Quentin takes Julia's blame on himself for telling Julia about magic in the first place, and Julia is allowed to pass through. Quentin now has to pay her debt. Ember appears, and Quentin is dethroned and ejected from Fillory with a magic button from Josh which will return him to Earth, and a silver watch from Eliot. In the Neitherlands, Quentin sees everything is getting back to normal – though he himself feels a terrible loss.

Analysis

As the novel concludes, a number of remaining mysteries are fully solved. The gods have come back to claim their magic because Julia and her group of underground magician friends have contacted one of them – and as the trickster fox god explains, to contact one is contact them all.

The rape of Julia – and here, the reader should reflect on ancient Greek mythology by way of the rape of Leda by Zeus disguised as a swan – gives Julia a level of higher magic that her other friends do not have. Julia, so long attempting to fully integrate herself into magic – what completes her, what makes her feel like she belongs – finally gets her wish, though it is not how she imagined it would happen. Here, the theme of journey should be reflected upon. Julia has lost some part of herself in the process of achieving a higher degree of magic, and she learns that sometimes, what is gained is not necessarily worth the cost.

Quentin's own journey should also be noted here. Quentin, upon successfully opening the seven-key door, is stunned to discover he cannot pass through. He has wanted to be a hero, to continue to explore and do great things – and he has done one remarkable, heroic thing by saving the world of Fillory. But as with all journeys, the journey is not just in getting somewhere or doing something – but what is learned along the way.

Quentin fails to remember the wisdom of the dragon in the Grand Canal, who says that to be a hero, one must endure great loss. Quentin believed previously he has lost all he could – but the reader will here remember Dean Fogg's cautioning Quentin about his believing he knew better than everyone else. As it turns out, Quentin has not lost everything, having taken his throne for granted. Dethroned, Quentin has now truly lost everything – and become a hero in the process. He now goes from being a king of a magical fantasy land to an ordinary 20-something on Earth.

The reader also realizes that the unpaid taxes from Outer Island were a superficial pretext to initiate a journey to find the keys that would save Fillory. Having been seen by the Seeing Hare and Ember, the journey is orchestrated by the gods and special creatures of Fillory in order to save Fillory. While the gods themselves must behave in accord with the laws of the magical universe, mortals may do as they please. It thus



takes a band of mortal friends to save Fillory, just as the Chatwin children had saved and adventured in Fillory decades before.

It should also be noted that, in the end, Quentin assumes a Christ-like position. Jesus, who saves the world by taking its sins upon Himself out of love, loses his life in the process, but is transfigured into the Christ (the Savior). Quentin saves Fillory and assumes the wrongs that Julia has done on himself out of friendship, loses his throne in the process, but is transformed into a hero. Just as Jesus pays the ultimate price to save the world, Quentin pays a costly price to save Fillory. Indeed, Jesus Christ assuming the sins of the world on Himself means people may ascend to Heaven. Quentin assuming the sins of Julia on himself means that Julia may move to the next realm beyond Fillory.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Quentin truly becomes a hero by the end of the novel? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What does Quentin lose at the end of the novel? Do you believe this is fair? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

If you had been in Quentin's position, would you have taken Julia's guilt on yourself? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

jostled, ruminant, quiescent, monotonously, sigils, invocation, palimpsest



Characters

Quentin Coldwater

Quentin Coldwater is a magician in his early twenties who is originally from New York, and now rules as king as one of four leaders of the magical land of Fillory. Quentin strives to be a good and just ruler, to honor the sacrifice made by his deceased girlfriend, Alice, who died saving his life. Quentin volunteers to travel to Outer Island to learn why they have not paid their taxes in years, and Queen Julia accompanies him. There, Quentin's old habit of restlessness catches up to him, spurring him on to seek a magical golden key, which opens a portal that returns both he and Julia to Earth.

From the Chatwin House in England, Quentin and Julia return to Fillory with their friends Josh and Poppy, where they join Eliot's quest to find all seven golden keys needed to save Fillory. Having successfully found the keys and saved Fillory, Quentin is stunned to discover he cannot cross into the next realm to seek out new discoveries and new adventures. He finds it unfair that Julia cannot cross over, either, and so takes her sins on himself. As such, he is punished by being dethroned and exiled from Fillory. Now a hero, he has lost everything.

Julia

Julia is a magician in her early twenties who is originally from New York, and now rules as queen as one of four leaders of the magical land of Fillory. Julia has striven her entire life to become a part of the world of magic. Stunned, depressed, and angered after being rejected from Brakebills at the age of 17, she endeavored to learn magic on her own, traveling around the world from one underground magical safe house to the next to hone her craft, and finally meeting up with Pouncy and other friends from an online BBS who brought her skills to new heights. Working with them, Julia attempted to contact the gods to achieve a higher, deeper level of magic – but the result was catastrophic, leading to a number of deaths and Julia's being raped. The rape takes something away from Julia's core, but leaves her with greater magical skills.

In the present time, Julia joins Quentin on his quest to find the seven golden keys. During that time, Julia is transformed into a demigoddess due to her rape and her calling on the goddess, Our Lady Underground. When the keys are found and the door is opened to save Fillory, Julia is denied entry, for her attempt to contact the gods is what caused the gods to try to reclaim magic from the world and nearly destroying Fillory. When Quentin assumes Julia's sins on himself, Julia is allowed to cross into the next world from Fillory.



Eliot

Eliot is a magician in his early twenties who rules as king as one of four leaders of the magical land of Fillory. Eliot is a driven leader who strives to do his best. He is highly sensitive to things, is gay, and worries about the powerful magic that Julia can do. After the disappearance of Quentin and Julia to Earth, Eliot is tasked by the Unique Beasts of Fillory with finding the seven golden keys to save the magical world, a task which he undertakes for over a year before Quentin and Julia reappear, and join the quest.

Janet

Janet is a magician in her early twenties who rules as queen as one of four leaders of the magical land of Fillory. She is courageous and beautiful, and is given the task of safeguarding Fillory while Quentin, Julia, and Eliot undertake the quest for the seven golden keys.

Josh

Josh is a magician who is in his early twenties, and who first befriended Quentin and the others at Brakebills. Overweight but adventurous, Josh became the guardian of the magic button after the previous trip to Fillory ended in disaster. He spent years traveling to other worlds, and later sold the magic button to the Grand Canal dragon in Venice for \$250-million. Quentin then used \$36-million to buy and renovate a massive palazzo in Venice where he lives until he joins the quest for the seven golden keys with Quentin, Julia, and the others. When Quentin is booted out of Fillory, Josh gives Quentin his palazzo.

Poppy

Poppy is a tall, thin, young, pretty magician who is originally from Australia. She specializes in the study of dragons, and is called on by Josh to help Quentin contact the Grand Canal dragon. She later travels with Quentin and the others to the Chatwin House, skeptical of interdimensional travel. When she learns that Fillory is real, she decides not to return to the real world.

Penny

Penny is a friend of Quentin's from Brakebills who was a member of the original trip to Fillory. It is Penny who first discovered that interdimensional travel was truly possible, and it was Penny who first brought everyone to Fillory. During that first adventure, Penny lost both his hands, and rather than returning to Earth, remained behind in the Neitherlands where he became a member of the Order, which cares for the Neitherlands. It is there that Penny discovers the gods are seeking to reclaim their



magic, and Penny reveals this to Quentin and Julia when they appear in the Neitherlands. He and the Order, together with the dragons of Earth, will fight and delay the gods until Quentin and Julia can save the magic.

Ember

Ember the Ram is a local god in Fillory who, like the other Unique Creatures, knows that the old gods are seeking to reclaim their magic. Places based wholly on magic, like Fillory, will be destroyed. Ember thus helps set in motion a series of events which will lead to Quentin, Julia, and Eliot finding the seven golden keys to save Fillory. Ember himself does not find the keys, though he knows where they all are, due to magic constraints of having to work within the laws of magic set by higher gods.

Pouncy

Pouncy is an underground magician that Julia meets through the Free Traders Beowulf BBS. Julia joins Pouncy and the others in Murs, France, where they help her become more proficient in magic, and she in turn joins them in their quest to contact a god and achieve a higher level of magic. The attempt is disastrous, as Pouncy is killed, Julia is raped, and the gods – alerted to what Pouncy, Julia, and the others were seeking to do – decide to reclaim their magic, and deny its use to people.

The old gods

The old gods are the most powerful of the gods in the realm of magic, who have structured the realm themselves. They are immensely powerful, and wield magic of such magnitude that they can literally reorder the world. Alerted to the fact that mortals have been accessing their magic, they begin to rework the world to deny them this access. The gods are confronted by the Order and the dragons of Earth, who delay them long enough for Quentin and his group to find the seven golden keys and sustain access to magic.



Symbols and Symbolism

"The Seven Golden Keys"

"The Seven Golden Keys" is a fairy tale for children based on a true story. The story involves a father spending years searching for the golden keys which will free his daughter, held captive by a witch in a silver castle. When the father finds the keys and saves his daughter, she does not recognize him, and insists he cannot be her father as she leaves. The father is heartbroken, and must endure a tremendous loss – even though he is a hero. "The Seven Golden Keys" is given to Quentin by Elaine in Outer Island, both to orient him to the idea of seven golden keys, and to lay the groundwork for the loss that he will eventually face.

The seven golden keys

The seven golden keys are seven golden magic keys crafted by the people who first accessed the magical system of the gods. While they keys have been used for various purposes throughout history (such as in the fairy tale "The Seven Golden Keys"), their original intent was to unlock the last (or back emergency) door to the world of magic should the gods ever decide to try to seal off magic from the rest of existence. When the gods seek to reclaim their magic, Quentin, Eliot, Julia, and others are sent on a quest to find the seven golden keys to unlock the back door to save Fillory. Each of the keys must either be fought for or riddled for, except for the last, which Quentin receives from Benedict in the underworld.

Passports

Passports are drawn by little Eleanor for Quentin when he leaves Outer Island. The passports are magical and allow Quentin the ability to travel into the underworld to see Benedict. Having surrendered his passport in the underworld, Quentin is unable to leave the magical world of Fillory for the next magical world beyond.

BBS

Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) are online messaging boards and social networking sites used by Pouncy, Julia, and others in the underground magical community. It is through the BBS that Julia first learns to do magic on her own, and discovers the underground magic network. It is her first step toward becoming a member of the magical world that she previously had been rejected from by way of Brakebills, and gives her a sense of belonging and community.



The Muntjac

The Muntjac is an enchanted oceangoing ship that is selected by Quentin for the journey to Outer Island. The Muntjac is refitted and repaired for the voyage, and later becomes the ship on which Eliot sails (and is later joined by Quentin, Julia, Josh, and Poppy) to seek out the seven golden keys to save Fillory.

Magic button

The magic button is one of several magic buttons given to the Chatwin children which will enable them to come and go from Fillory as they please. They are hidden by one of the Chatwin sisters, who believes that passage to Fillory must be earned, not undertaken at will. One such magic button is discovered by Penny, who uses it to bring Quentin and the others to Fillory for their first trip, which ends in disaster. Josh becomes the keeper of the button after the trip, using it to travel to other worlds. He then sells it to the Venice Grand Canal dragon for \$250-million. The dragon later utilizes the button to bring the other dragons of Earth to the Neatherlands to assist the Order in delaying the gods so that the seven magic keys can be found, and the emergency back door to magic thrown open.

Rocket bed

The rocket bed belongs to young Thomas, who now lives in the Chatwin House with his family. It is while sitting on the rocket bed and playing games that Quentin, Julia, Josh, and Poppy are whisked away back to Fillory, where they are found at sea by Eliot aboard the Muntjac.

The first door

The first door to the magical world of Fillory is located in the grand clock in a back hall in the Chatwin House. It is through the clock that the Chatwin children first access Fillory, and it is to the first door that Quentin, Julia, Josh, and Poppy travel to get to Fillory.

The last door

The last door (which can also be seen as an emergency back door) is created by the hackers who first broke into the magical system, and accessed magic. The door serves as a way back in to magic should the magical world of Fillory – or any part of the magic world at all – be shut out by the gods. The last door in this situation exists at the outer edge of Fillory, is embedded into a brick wall ten feet high along a tiny strip of beach that runs to either horizon. The last door is opened by seven golden keys, and what lies on the other side of the door is not exactly known.

Crowns

Crowns are worn by the kings and queens of Fillory, including Quentin, Julia, Eliot, and Janet. When Quentin assumes the sins of Julia on his shoulders, Quentin is not only stripped of his crown and throne, but is kicked out of Fillory. The crown, a symbol of Quentin's regal prowess and his kingship, once removed, demonstrates just how much he has lost.



Settings

Fillory

Fillory is a magical land written about in the “Fillory and Further” novels by Christopher Plover, and is the land over which Quentin, Julia, Eliot, and Janet rule as kings and queens. Fillory is a diverse empire, full of mountains, forests, rivers, open land, coastal areas, and islands. Fillory is home to some twenty-thousand inhabitants, half of them people, the other half various anthropomorphized creatures. Fillory is overseen by Ember the Ram, the local god, and by the Twelve Unique Beasts of Fillory, including the Seeing Hare who predicts death and despair are imminent. With the gods reclaiming magic, lands wholly based on magic, like Fillory, are in danger of being totally wiped out. It is to save the land of Fillory that Quentin, Eliot, Julia, and the others embark on a quest to find the seven golden keys.

After Island

After Island is an island beyond the farthest extent of the Fillorian Empire, far beyond Outer Island. After Island resembles the cold grayness of the English coast, and is where Quentin finds the first golden key in a chapel. From After Island, Quentin and Julia are transported to Chestertown, Massachusetts, on Earth, while using the golden key.

Earth

Earth is variously referred to as 'home', 'back there', and 'the real world' throughout the novel. Earth – specifically the United States of America – is where Quentin, Julia, Penny, Eliot, Janet, and the others are originally from. It is in New York in the United States that most of them attended Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy. Julia herself traveled throughout the world on Earth, from one underground magical safe house to the next in her attempt to master the craft of magic. It is back to Earth that Quentin and Julia are sent from After Island, and they travel to Brakebills, Venice, Italy, and the Chatwin House in the Cornwall region of England to return to Fillory. Julia hates Earth, and is horrified to be returned there after having spent so much time to get away from Earth, and make it to the realm of magic.

The Chatwin House

The Chatwin House is formerly owned by the Chatwin family, and is located in the Cornwall region of England, near the town of Fowey. The Chatwin House is an elegant and modestly-sized country house, surrounded by gardens and beautiful lawns, and neighboring the property of Christopher Plover. It is from the Chatwin House that Quentin, Julia, Poppy, and Josh are taken to Fillory on a rocket-shaped bed.

The Wall

The Wall is the farthest extent of the magical world in which Fillory exists. Standing ten feet tall on a narrow stretch of beach from horizon to horizon, the wall has a single door in it meant to be opened by seven golden keys. The door serves as the emergency back entrance into the world of magic should all other access points to magic be cut off or concealed. It is to the wall that Quentin, Julia, Eliot, Josh, Poppy, and the others travel to save Fillory, but it is only Julia, Abigail the Sloth, and Bingle who pass through the Wall.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

Friendship is an important theme in the novel “The Magician King” by Lev Grossman. Friendship is absolutely essential and crucial to the plot of “The Magician King”, especially for Quentin and Julia as they endeavor to save the kingdom of Fillory, as well as prevent the magical realm from being sealed off to mortals by the gods.

When the novel begins, friendship is on clear display between Quentin, Julia, Eliot, and Janet, who rule over Fillory as kings and queens. They work together to solve problems – a task made easier by the loyalty between them generated by their friendship and trust in one another – and enjoy spending time together, whether they are hanging around the castle or going out on daylong excursions, such as the one at the beginning of the novel to catch the Seeing Hare. The concern of these friends toward one another can also easily be seen in even simple ways as well. Consider the scene where Eliot cautions Quentin against falling in love with Julia due to the sort of magic she practices – a caution not borne of fear, but of genuine worry for Quentin.

When Quentin embarks on the journey to Outer Island to investigate unpaid taxes, it is Julia who goes with him out of friendship and loyalty. She knows what it feels like to be alone, and it is plain to see that she does not want Quentin to have to be alone on his trip to Outer Island. Likewise, she spent so much time trying to find and reconnect with Quentin that it is apparent she doesn't want to let him out of her sight for too long. Quentin and Julia later work together to get back from Earth to Fillory, a task which causes them to rely on one another's friendship to get through various stages of the journey, such as when Julia brings Quentin to the underground magic safe house network.

Back in Fillory, Quentin and Julia – along with Josh and Poppy, who becomes fast friends with everyone – immediately consent to assisting Eliot in his search for the remaining two golden keys due in no small part to their friendship. The friends travel far and wide to discover the two keys – including a trip to the underworld made by Quentin and Julia, where Julia is prepared to defend Quentin against Martin Chatwin out of a sense of loyalty, friendship, and belonging.

At the very end of the novel, with Fillory saved and the seven-key door opened to other worlds of magic, Quentin makes a Christ-like sacrifice for Julia by taking responsibility for the sins she has committed. As such, she is allowed to pass through the door to whatever worlds of magic await, but Quentin is not only not allowed to pass through the door, but he is expelled from Fillory as well. It is the ultimate sacrifice of friendship that Quentin makes for Julia.



Journeys

Journeys form an important theme in the novel “The Magician King” by Lev Grossman. Journeys are important in novels, thematically, because they involve not only travel, but learning. In novels, journeys are very rarely only ever about getting from one place to another, or achieving some ultimate end – but are important due to what is learned along the way by those making the journey. This is certainly the case in “The Magician King”, as the novel is replete with journeys.

The very first journey undertaken in the novel is a short journey – one which pits Quentin, Julia, Eliot, and Janet against the task of finding the Seeing Hare. This is more than just a leisurely excursion for royalty, as the four rulers and friends learn that darkness is settling over Fillory. The Hare predicts death and despair –something which sets the tone for the entire plot of the novel.

The next journey undertaken is seemingly simple at best: a quest to Outer Island to inquire about unpaid taxes. But the journey, as later revealed, has far deeper implications. The taxes are a superficial reason to ensnare the four rulers in a larger quest to find seven golden keys to save Fillory (this will be treated in a paragraph below). “The Seven Golden Keys”, a parting gift from Elaine on Outer Island, first truly and thoroughly introduces Quentin to the entire idea of the golden keys.

The golden key that Quentin and Julia discover sends them back to Earth, from which they struggle to return to Fillory – which becomes a journey in and of itself. During this journey to return to Fillory, Quentin learns something incredibly important from the Grand Canal dragon in Venice, though Quentin does not understand what he is told right away. The dragon tells Quentin that he desires to be a hero, true – but heroes must be prepared to lose everything. Quentin erroneously believes he has already learned everything – and this itself demonstrates that he still has much to learn.

At the same time as these various journeys unfold, the journey of Julia to access the world of magic is also told. Her journey through the magical underground of safe houses is detailed, as is her improvement in the craft of magic. She learns magic along the way, and desires to achieve higher levels of older magic, perhaps even becoming a goddess. Yet she has second thoughts when she and her fellow underground magicians prepare to summon a goddess – a summoning which is disastrous. Most of Julia’s friends are killed by the trickster fox god, and Julia herself is brutally raped, though through the rape she is endowed with magical powers. Despite gaining this, she feels as if she has lost something deep inside her – and here she learns that one should be careful what one wishes for, because the cost may be great.

The overarching journey in the novel consists of the quest to find the seven golden keys, and to save Fillory. This is successfully accomplished – though the ending is bittersweet at best. Quentin, in Christ-like fashion, assumes Julia’s sins so that she may move into the next place of magic beyond Fillory. Quentin is then shocked to discover that he did indeed have more to lose: his crown, and his residency in Fillory. He is a hero for having saved Fillory and protecting Julia’s right to move beyond Fillory – but he



himself loses everything in the process. As a result, Quentin grows tremendously in character and nature, and demonstrates the best he has to offer. The journey for Quentin has been about growth, learning, and sacrifice – and not merely finding keys and saving Fillory.

Belonging

Belonging is an important theme in the novel “The Magician King” by Lev Grossman. Belonging (the sense of belonging) is the idea that one fits in, is accepted, is important, and is valued and respected among a group of people or organization of some kind. In the novel, the theme of belonging most appropriately suits Julia.

Julia has long sought to feel as if she belongs on Earth, to feel as though she fits in somewhere. A large part of her reason for dating James – though the relationship did not last – was to feel as if she fit in somewhere. She always felt as if there was something else she was missing, something else she wanted, but could not figure it out until being rejected from Brakebills, and having the reality of the magic world confirmed to her by Quentin. Rather than being embraced by, and belonging to the world of magic, Julia is rejected from it, and this rejection plots her trajectory.

From the confirmation of the magic world onward, Julia attempts to teach herself magic through anything she can find either online, or on the old BBS network. It is through her seeking out of magic that she becomes a part of the underground magic community. She is desperate to be a part of the world of magic, and so travels the world to hone her skills in magic. She is ultimately accepted by a group of underground magicians on the Free Trader Beowulf BBS, and these individuals makes her feel as if she fits in and truly belongs somewhere. When she meets them in person, she feels this sense of belonging even more. She becomes a valued and respected part of the attempt to breach a higher level of magic.

Later in Fillory, Julia again comes to feel as if she finally, truly has found where she has belonged all along – squarely in the magical realm beyond Earth. Here, she is accepted as a ruler and an integral part of the friendship shared with Quentin, Janet, and Eliot, and her accidental trip to Earth with Quentin from After Island demonstrates how desperate Julia is to get back where she belongs.

To a large degree, Quentin also feels the impulse of belonging in Fillory. It has become his home, and he is attempting to live his life in honor of Alice’s sacrifice. When Quentin is dethroned and exiled from Fillory, he feels as if he has not only lost his crown and his home, but his sense of belonging as well.

Magic

Magic is an important theme in the novel “The Magician King” by Lev Grossman. Magic, specifically, entails the use of words, intonations, or gestures to create supernatural responses, incidents, and actions. Magic generally and historically is a system and



structural force in the world that is learned about by Quentin and the others through the course of the novel.

Magic abounds in the novel in specific ways. Fillory is itself a land composed entirely by way of magic. Everything in Fillory is magical, from the enchanted ship Muntjac on which everyone sails to the clock-trees growing in the forest, from half the inhabitants of Fillory being anthropomorphized creatures to the Unique Beasts of Fillory, to the local god, Ember the Ram, who watches over all. Magic also comes by way of Quentin and the others casting spells and performing magic with their hands – such as warming spells or freezing spells.

Beyond the specific uses of magic, magic in general, and historically, is something greatly considered and pondered by Penny and Dean Fogg. Both of them believe that magic is a system that mortals never originally had access to, but have, for some reason, been able to tap into. As Penny later learns and tells Quentin and Julia, this is indeed the case. Julia's attempt to tap into a higher level of magic by calling down a god has alerted the gods to the knowledge that other beings have accessed their magical world, and they are now moving to shut down all access to magic.

For those who use magic on Earth, the loss of magic will be simple: they simply lose their magical abilities. For those in places like Fillory, wholly formed from and dependent upon magic, the loss of magic will be catastrophic in that they will altogether cease to exist. Penny reveals, however, that the people who first tapped into the magical realm made sure to leave a last door, or emergency back door, back into the magical system in case access was threatened. This magical door can be opened by seven golden magical keys, the quest for which makes up much of the plot of the novel.

Heroism

Heroism is an important theme in the novel "The Magician King" by Lev Grossman. Heroism involves courageous action that is morally just or right, and that is often to the benefit and assistance of others (who are often unable to help themselves). In the novel, two main heroes are presented, both of whom share things in common with one another, and neither of whom are prepared for what it takes to be a hero.

Quentin longs to be a hero. When he confronts the Venetian dragon in the Grand Canal, the dragon tells Quentin that heroism isn't about winning, but losing everything that matters. At the time, Quentin believes he has lost everything he can possibly lose, but he is wrong. Heroically, he saves Fillory, keeps the magical door open, and takes on Julia's sins so that she may pass through the magical door. For this selfless act, however, Quentin is stripped of his crown, dethroned, and exiled from Fillory. Despite his noble intentions of assuming Julia's sins, and his heroic courage in saving Fillory, he loses everything he has fought to save, even though he has saved it. As predicted, Quentin is devastated by that paradox – that he is banned from that which he has saved. He has now truly lost everything, but he is celebrated as a hero.



Quentin's story closely mirrors that of the father in story "The Seven Golden Keys". Quentin does not pay careful enough attention to the story, but for the reader of "The Magician King", the message is clear. In "The Seven Golden Keys", a father spends years collecting the seven golden keys which will free his daughter from the silver castle where she has been imprisoned by an evil witch.

When he arrives, he is an old man, but he is still the hero of the day, as he sets his daughter free. His daughter, heartbreakingly, does not recognize him, and she flies away. That which he has wanted most – to free and reunite with his daughter – he has lost. He has succeeded, but he has lost. And that is the paradox: what he has wanted most is no longer his.

The father is kept alive by the power of the golden key, becoming a literal walking corpse – the physical manifestation of the way he feels emotionally. Quentin, too, now feels dead without being able to continue living in Fillory. He, like the father, has everything he wanted – and nothing that he wanted after all.

Styles

Point of View

Lev Grossman tells his novel “The Magician King” in the third-person omniscient narrative mode. This is done for at least three reasons. First, the third-person omniscient narrative mode maintains consistency with the telling of the first novel in “The Magician” trilogy. Second, the third-person narrative mode allows the author to follow not only Quentin’s story and journey, but allows the author to delve into Julia’s history as well. This is crucial because Julia’s past bears such importance in the present, especially in the reason behind needing to search for the golden keys. Third, as such, Julia’s chapters from the past, and Quentin’s chapters in the present, are told in a consistent narrative voice, making transition between past and present easier for the reader. The omniscient nature of the third-person makes these forays into Julia’s past possible.

Language and Meaning

Lev Grossman tells his novel “The Magician King” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least a few reasons: first, the novel involves the adventures of new adults – people in their twenties – who use language that is crisp and to the point in the contemporary era (the book was published in 2012 and written in 2011). This makes the book both accessible to new adult and young adult audiences, and adds an air of believability and reality to the story. The simple and straightforward language also reflects the fact that the book, in size, scope, and amount of content, is vast – and the simple and straightforward language helps the reader to keep track of diverse peoples, places, events, histories (both of magic and of Julia), and parallel dimensions and worlds as well.

Structure

Lev Grossman divides his novel “The Magician King” into four primary parts, with each part further subdivided into numbered but untitled chapters. Each part (numbered Books I to Book IV) deals with a major set of circumstances or time period in the novel. For example, Book I consists of Quentin’s life as a king of the kingdom of Fillory. Book II deals with the attempts of Quentin and Julia to return to Fillory after opening a door and ending up in Chestertown, Massachusetts. In Book I, Chapter 1, Quentin, Julia, Eliot, and Janet are on the hunt for the Seeing Hare, and learn that darkness and despair will soon befall Fillory. In Book IV, Chapter 25, the attempt of Julia and the underground magicians to call down a god ends in catastrophe.



Quotes

The dream had become real.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: For much of his life, Quentin has dreamed of living in a place like Fillory, being a king, and aspiring to heroics. Now, what Quentin has long dreamed of doing has come true: he is a king, he does live in Fillory, and his next step is to become a hero.

Fillory was a darker and more dangerous place in real life than it was in the books. Bad things happened, there. Terrible things. People got hurt and killed and worse.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 27)

Importance: Although Fillory is a dreamlike world of magic, that doesn't mean it isn't susceptible to danger or evil. Evil exists in every place in every corner of every world, and this is a hard lesson that Quentin and the others learned in the previous book – and continue to learn in the present book. This is important because, once again, bad things are set to happen, which Quentin and the others must find a way to overcome.

I am a king, he thought. Even in the real world I'm still a king. Nothing can take that away.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 7)

Importance: Put back in the real world on Earth, Quentin attempts to console himself with the knowledge that, in Fillory, he is still a king. This gives him enough motivation to keep moving, to want to return to Fillory from Earth.

A hero must be prepared to lose.

-- The Grand Canal Dragon (Chapter 14 paragraph 162)

Importance: While visiting the dragon in the Grand Canal in Venice, Quentin receives some important information from the dragon – that heroes are noted not for what they have won, but what they have lost as well. Quentin erroneously believes he has lost everything possible, and this will prove telling by the end of the novel.

The first door, the dragon had said. The first door. The first door. What did it mean?

-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 2)

Importance: Here, Quentin and the others attempt to figure out what the dragon meant by saying the way back into Fillory is still possible through the first door. This leads Quentin and the others to realize that the first door is the Chatwin House in Cornwall, England.

They're taking the magic back, Quentin. They're going to take it all away from us.

-- Penny (Chapter 22 paragraph 44)



Importance: Here, Penny reveals the truth behind everything going on. Learning their magical system has been breached and is being used, the gods are moving to restructure the world so that magic is no longer accessible to anyone but them. This means that magicians will no longer be able to perform magic, places like Brakebills will no longer have a purpose, and worlds composed entirely of magic, like Fillory, will altogether cease to exist.

Sometimes the living can give something to the dead. And perhaps he could offer you something too.

-- Abigail the Sloth (Chapter 24 paragraph 111)

Importance: Here, Abigail encourages Quentin to journey to the underworld to visit Benedict, who feels his death has been without purpose. Quentin is able to comfort Benedict, assuring him that he was important to the greater scheme of things – and Benedict in turn offers Quentin the final missing golden key.

I feel finished. I feel like I am finally finished. I became who I was becoming.

-- Julia (Chapter 26 paragraph 15)

Importance: Transformed into a demigoddess by Our Lady Underground, Julia feels as if she has finally become who she was always intended to be: not fully divine, but not fully human, either. She now has access to a higher level of magic, just like she wanted, and she now truly belongs to the magical world, for magic now flows through her veins.

But I realized I had to become something. I had to take what was done to me and use it to make myself into what I wanted to be.

-- Julia (Chapter 26 paragraph 24)

Importance: Here, Julia speaks about her past, specifically referring to how she was raped. While the rape itself was terrifying, the rape leads to Julia gaining greater magical powers as a result. Though the rape is horrible, Julia decides to persevere, to put her newly-acquired magical abilities to good use – and she does in that she is ready to challenge Martin Chatwin, and in that she is transformed into a demigoddess.

The girl I was is dead.

-- Julia (Chapter 26 paragraph 27)

Importance: Here, Julia makes a statement that is profound in both its literal and figurative sense. Julia is literally no longer a girl, as she is now a demigoddess. Likewise, who she was prior to being a demigoddess – someone who was always searching and seeking to belong – is now gone, for she truly feels as if she belongs to the magical world, because magic flows through her, making her literally a part of that world.