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opening extract from

Septimus Heap: The Magykal Papers

written by

Angie Sage

published by

Bloomsbury Publishing

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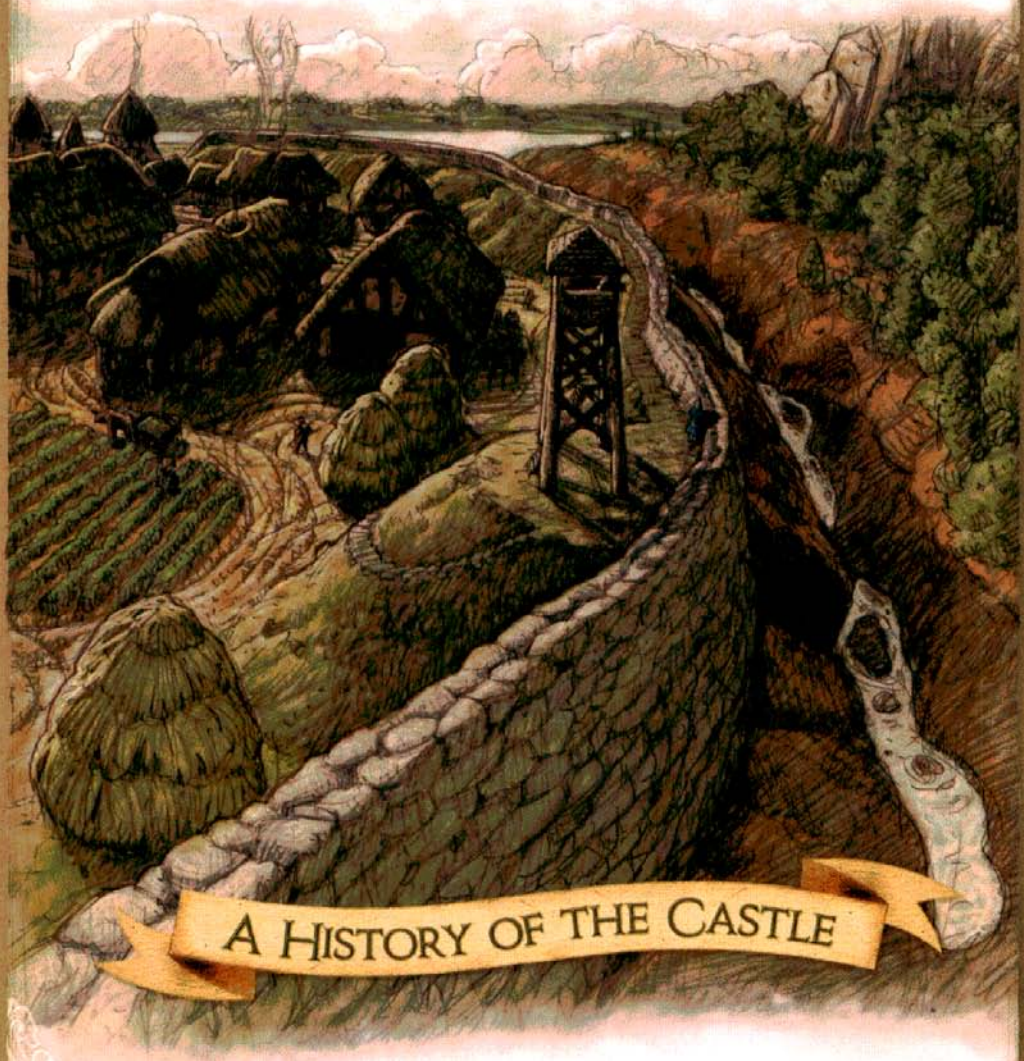
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PAPERS FROM

THE CASTLE



A History of the Castle

LONG, LONG AGO, BEFORE THE TIME OF HOTEP-RA, before even the first Queen arrived on her Royal Barge, a small village was nestled beside a river bend.

The village had begun its life as a place of refuge for those escaping from the nearby Forest, which was a Darke and dangerous place. The villagers were quiet people and wanted no trouble. They dug a ditch between themselves

and the Forest and put up a long, low dry-stone wall beside it; they tended their crops and their livestock and kept to themselves. The village traded with the Port and with the Farmlands; it prospered and grew, and the ditch and the wall crept out towards the Forest.

But the prosperity of the village came to the attention of the Forest creatures, who wanted some of the rich pickings to be found there. At night the villagers would lock their doors and listen fearfully as werewolves, witches and all manner of **Darke Things** came in from the Forest, creeping and rustling, snuffling and snarling through the lanes. The creatures took their chickens and goats, **Blighted** the crops, **Fouled** the wells, and one stifling summer's night, they stole a baby from her crib as she lay by an open window.

The night after the baby was taken, the villagers began the Wall. For months they worked, building a strong, high wall on their side of the ditch, sealing the gaps in the stones with lime, taking it higher than anyone thought it was possible for a wall to be. It was thick too—as thick as a man was tall—and along the top ran a broad path for the newly formed Forest Night Patrol to tread. They worked through three summers and four freezing winters until at last the Wall surrounded the village and the Castle was born.

Now the villagers began to feel safe.

But *still* the occasional **Darke** Forest creatures ventured in. Climbing **Things** with suckered feet and razor-sharp teeth would creep over at night, and the occasional scream would pierce the night air as an unwary villager was caught in the light of a full moon.

The next spring, undeterred, the Castle-dwellers dug their ditch deeper and deeper. Once more they worked into the winter, stopping for the Big Freeze, starting again in the spring. Deeper and deeper they dug until brown river water began to seep in. An air of expectation filled the village.

MidSummer Day was a sacred day for the villagers, as that was the one day of the year when no Forest tree shadows fell upon their land. And so, on that particular MidSummer Day, the villagers divided into two halves—one half to each end of the ditch. At the sound of a trumpet blown from the top of the Wall they breached the banks between the ditch and the river. The water roared in, a great cheer went up and their ditch became the Moat. A Mid-Summer Day Feast was held and all the villagers slept well in their beds that night.

The North Gate gatehouse and drawbridge were built some years later, when the old wooden bridge across the river to the Farmlands collapsed in a fast and high spring tide with the loss of many lives. It was decided for safety to build two new stone bridges (one-way traffic on each) where the span was less, but the only place for this was a little way upriver, outside the Wall. The Castle-dwellers had no intention of letting any Forest creatures back into their lives and decided on a drawbridge that would be raised at sunset and lowered at dawn.

In the end only one stone bridge was built. Castle jokers called it the One Way Bridge, and the name stuck.

ONE WAY BRIDGE



The summer before the Moat was completed, a strange thing happened. On a hot midsummer's day, under a sky of brilliant blue, a beautiful, ornately gilded barge bedecked with fluttering red canopies came up the river. It had gathered quite a crowd by the time it tied up on the long, low riverbank some way up past Raven's Rock.

The occupants of the barge were a beautiful dark-haired young woman with deep violet eyes and her three dark-haired tiny daughters. The young woman spoke a strange language that no one in the Castle had ever heard before, and she was dressed in rich red velvet edged with thick gold ribbons and—to the fascination of the crowd—she wore a *crown*.

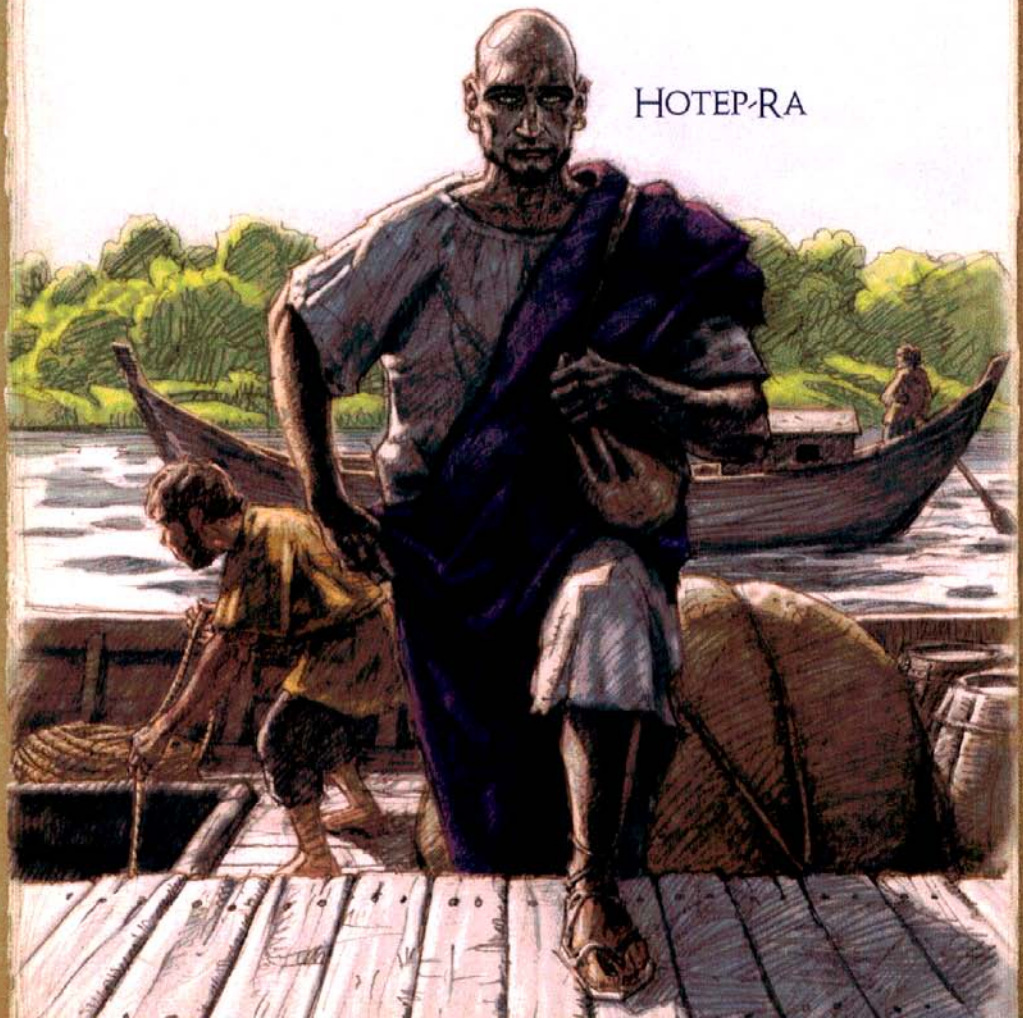
At this time, the Castle inhabitants were still simple folk without much learning. They dressed in plain clothes woven from flax grown in the Farmlands and they knew little of gold or finery. The young Queen—for this was what they took her to be—made a huge impression. And it seemed that the Castle folk made a pretty good impression on the young Queen, for she showed no signs of wanting to leave. She and her daughters spent the long, hot summer living on their barge—as they had done for many years—and when the chill winds of autumn blew up the river the Castle folk gave her the best house in the Castle to live in.

This house was on the site of what was soon to become the Palace. It was built from the same yellow sandstone that all the Castle houses were built from in those days. Over the years the house was added to and improved upon until it grew to become the Palace—a beautiful long, low building with a turret at either end and wide lawns sweeping down to the river and the Palace Landing Stage where the Royal Barge first drew up.

The young Queen soon learned the language of the Castle and the surrounding areas, and her three daughters all grew up speaking

it as their mother tongue. The Queen never did say where she came from or why she had left, and somehow no one in the Castle ever quite liked to ask her. What did it matter after all? They had their Queen, and the Queen had her Castle. It was an arrangement that suited everyone.

Many years later, when that Queen's great-great-great-great—and then some—granddaughter was Queen, another momentous arrival occurred—one that was to change the Castle for ever. Hotep-Ra, the very first ExtraOrdinary Wizard, arrived.



Hotep-Ra did not, however, arrive in quite the same style as the Queen had once done. He came, bedraggled and tired, and not a little dispirited, on the night Port barge. The weather was atrocious and Hotep-Ra had spent an uncomfortable night in the hold with some crates of overripe cheese, six terrified and very noisy piglets and some aggressive Port barge rats. He felt quite sick as he disembarked at the Quay and made his way into the Castle, which—with its slowly tolling bells and miserable-looking inhabitants—seemed to him a blighted and gloomy place.

Hotep-Ra soon found out the reason for the gloom—the adored eldest daughter of the Queen was dangerously ill. She was not expected to live to see another day. It had been a long time since Hotep-Ra had used his amazing combination of Magyk and Physik skills (he had been too much concerned with boat repairs for many years), but it was not long before he had talked his way into the Palace and was at the bedside of the Queen's daughter.

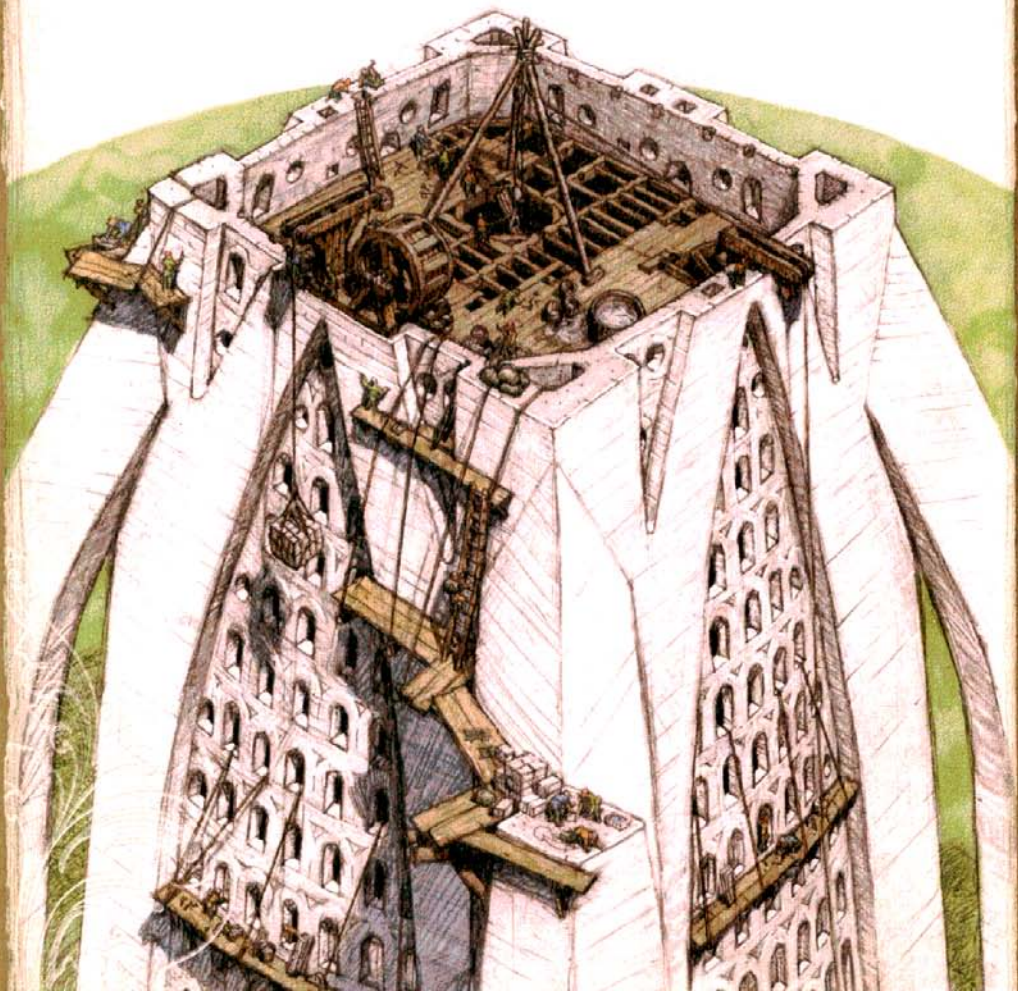
The Queen was not impressed with this stranger who professed to be able to cure her daughter. He was soaking wet, he wore a filthy old purple cloak and he smelled of pigs, but the Queen was wise enough to know that the most wonderful talent may be hidden in the oddest wrappings—and besides, she was desperate.

The Queen watched while Hotep-Ra stood very still and gazed for many long minutes at the Princess, who lay as white as the fine linen sheets that swathed her and as still as the great oak bedposts that rose all the way to the ceiling far above. And then, very slowly, Hotep-Ra leaned forward, took a deep breath in and breathed out. His breath came tumbling out in a long stream of pink mist, on and on it came, seemingly endless, enveloping the Princess. The Queen had never seen anything like it—how could anyone breathe out like that for so *long*?

And then it stopped. Hotep-Ra stepped back, exhausted. Suddenly the Princess opened her eyes, smiled and sat up. Five minutes later the Princess was eating a cheese sandwich, and Hotep-Ra was a hero.

The Queen offered Hotep-Ra anything that he wanted. All he asked for was a small plot of land in the middle of the Castle and help to build a tower. The middle of the Castle was already taken

THE BUILDING OF THE WIZARD TOWER





by a couple of Alchemists who refused to move, so Hotep-Ra settled for a very desirable spot at the end of a long, wide avenue known as the Way and within sight of the Palace. Here, to the amazement of the Castle inhabitants, he built the Wizard Tower and became the very first ExtraOrdinary Wizard.

The wonders of the Wizard Tower drew many people to the Castle, and soon the Ramblings was begun to provide the new residents with somewhere decent to live. The Ramblings was not planned—it just grew. People who needed a roof over their heads would help out until a few rooms were finished; then they would move in and others would take over. And so a huge warren of rooms and walkways began to grow along the river on the east side of the Castle. The Ramblings was soon stuffed with families and became a busy, noisy place with hundreds of little windows looking out over the river, a myriad of tiny roof gardens, theatres, shops, small factories and workshops, nurseries and schools. It was a wonderful place to live.