



# THE MAGICIAN OF TIGER CASTLE

LOUIS  
SACHAR

#1 NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR OF HOLES



BOOKS BY LOUIS SACHAR



*Holes*

*Small Steps*

*Fuzzy Mud*

*The Cardturner*

*Dogs Don't Tell Jokes*

*The Boy Who Lost His Face*

*There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*

*Sixth Grade Secrets*

*Someday Angeline*

WAYSIDE SCHOOL

*Sideways Stories from Wayside School*

*Wayside School Is Falling Down*

*Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger*

*Wayside School Beneath the Cloud of Doom*

*Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School*

*More Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School*

MARVIN REDPOST

*Kidnapped at Birth?*

*Why Pick on Me?*

*Is He a Girl?*

*Alone in His Teacher's House*

*Class President*  
*A Flying Birthday Cake?*  
*Super Fast, Out of Control*  
*A Magic Crystal?*

THE  
MAGICIAN  
OF  
TIGER  
CASTLE



Louis Sachar

*Ace*  
*New York*

ACE

Published by Berkley

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

[penguinrandomhouse.com](http://penguinrandomhouse.com)



Copyright © 2025 by Louis Sachar

Readers Guide copyright © 2025 by Louis Sachar

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

ACE is a registered trademark and the A colophon is a trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Cover design and illustration by Leo Nickolls

Book design by Daniel Brount, adapted for ebook

Export edition ISBN 9780593956748

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sachar, Louis, 1954- author.

Title: The magician of tiger castle / Louis Sachar.

Description: New York: Ace, 2025.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024043343 (print) | LCCN 2024043344 (ebook) | ISBN

9780593952306 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593952313 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Fantasy fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3569.A226 M34 2025 (print) | LCC PS3569.A226 (ebook) | DDC

813/.54—dc23/eng/20240927

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024043343>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024043344>

Ebook ISBN 9780593952313

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin  
Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin Do2 YH68, Ireland,

<https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>.

ep\_prh\_7.1a\_152576549\_co\_ro

# CONTENTS

*Dedication*

## Part One: Tamperings

Chapter 1: Homecoming

Chapter 2: The First Tiger

Chapter 3: Dittierri

Chapter 4: Princess Tullia

Chapter 5: Luigi

Chapter 6: Poppy Tears

Chapter 7: Pito

Chapter 8: Daisies

Chapter 9: Babette

Chapter 10: Vocal Cords

Chapter 11: The Jeweled Knife

[Chapter 12: The Release of the Tiger](#)

[Chapter 13: In the Dungeon](#)

[Chapter 14: A Twenty-First-Century Warning](#)

[Chapter 15: Delay](#)

[Chapter 16: Breakthrough](#)

[Chapter 17: Waiting for Inspiration](#)

[Chapter 18: Folly](#)

[Chapter 19: Replication](#)

[Chapter 20: Smoke Packets](#)

[Chapter 21: The Greatest Magician in All the Land](#)

[Chapter 22: The Banquet](#)

[Chapter 23: Entertainment](#)

[Chapter 24: Disposal of the Body](#)

[Chapter 25: Tiger Mice](#)

[Chapter 26: A Potion for the Prince](#)

[Chapter 27: The Unction](#)



[Chapter 28: The Festival](#)

[Chapter 29: What a Princess Does](#)

[Chapter 30: An Ancient Greek Ritual](#)

[Chapter 31: Cartilage](#)

[Chapter 32: The Invading Hordes](#)

[Chapter 33: The Magistrate's Office](#)

[Chapter 34: Leeches](#)

[Chapter 35: The Wedding of the Century](#)

## [Part Two: Unintended Consequences](#)

[Chapter 36: On Language and Spelling](#)

[Chapter 37: Returning to Tiger Castle...](#)

[Chapter 38: Obedience and Devotion](#)

[Chapter 39: Tullia's Choice](#)

[Chapter 40: Marta](#)

[Chapter 41: The Search for Pito](#)

[Chapter 42: Obstacle Course](#)

[Chapter 43: Noon](#)

[Chapter 44: Heralding the News](#)

[Chapter 45: Mud Dogs](#)

[Chapter 46: Oxatania](#)

[Chapter 47: Hooded Figures](#)

[Chapter 48: My Capuchin Robe](#)

[Chapter 49: A Miracle on the Mountain](#)

[Chapter 50: The Power of the Ordinary](#)

[Chapter 51: Cheese Wheel](#)

[Chapter 52: Whispers](#)

[Chapter 53: The Library Table](#)

[Chapter 54: The Western Trail](#)

[Chapter 55: Pito's Book](#)

[Chapter 56: The Devil's Messengers](#)

[Chapter 57: Enchantment](#)

[Chapter 58: Torteluga!](#)

[Chapter 59: The Wren and the Hummingbird](#)

[Chapter 60: Mermaid Boy](#)

[Chapter 61: Triangles](#)

[Chapter 62: A Most Important Decision](#)

[Chapter 63: A Long Journey](#)

[Chapter 64: The Whispering King](#)

[Chapter 65: Eternity, Day One](#)

[Part Three: A Long and Drawn-Out Ending](#)

[Chapter 66: Memories and Delusions](#)

[Chapter 67: A New World](#)

[Chapter 68: Final Thoughts](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Reading Group Guide](#)

[Questions for Discussion](#)

[About the Author](#)

*To the Cool Breezers*



PART ONE

**TAMPERINGS**



# 1



## HOME COMING

**S**O HERE I SIT, dressed like a typical American tourist, sipping a cappuccino at an outdoor table in an authentic medieval village. I can see the turrets of Tiger Castle in the distance, silhouetted against the red morning sky. I break off a piece of my almond croissant and place it inside the front pouch of my hoodie.

My hands are bruised, and I think I may have sprained my left wrist. The street here is paved with cobblestones, all of different shapes and sizes. In places, there are significant gaps between the stones. I doubt I was the first person to stumble and fall. My dignity suffered the greatest harm.

I suppose the street is kept like this for authenticity, but five hundred years ago there wouldn't have been coffee, or chocolate. Only the *popolo grasso*, or "fat people," could afford such luxuries. The *popolo minuto*—"little people"—ate mostly bread, ale, and whatever greens they managed to grow.

Also, a shop wasn't a separate entity then, but part of the craftsman's home. A craftsman worked in the front room, and the family slept together in the back room. (Only the *popolo grasso* could afford privacy.) The craftsman would lower his shutter outward toward the street to create a display table for his wares.

These cobblestones could well be the original stones, but five hundred years ago, the spaces between the stones were regularly refilled with a

claylike dirt. After a heavy rain, we'd have to strap wooden planks to the bottoms of our shoes to keep the mud off.

—

I TOOK A TOUR OF Tiger Castle yesterday. According to our tour guide, the tigers are well cared for and are fed a scientific blend of meat and nutritional supplements. In 1523, the tigers ate live animals, including goats, pigs, sheep, horses, and, of course, the occasional human.

It wasn't called Tiger Castle then, but simply the Castle, or perhaps the Esquavetian Castle. The kingdom of Esquaveta no longer exists.

As our tour guide led us along the winding corridors and up and down the stairs, she told tales of some of the people who had lived there. There was the Whispering King, a man so powerful he only needed to whisper. She also spoke of a treacherous queen who killed one king to marry another. And she related the tragic tale of a beautiful princess who was abducted on her wedding night and murdered.

I was disappointed that she never mentioned the great magician Anatole, but I suppose it was to be expected. History isn't written by the conquered. Besides, these days magicians are regarded as nothing more than entertaining tricksters. In the 1500s, science and magic were virtually indistinguishable. Gunpowder was created out of animal dung. Was that magic or science? If sand could be turned into glass, why couldn't it also be turned into gold?

I was surprised to see the enormous glass elephant. Considering how many times the castle had been conquered, I would have thought it had long been shattered.

The guide pointed out the entrance to a secret passageway, but to everyone's disappointment, we weren't allowed to venture in. She claimed it was too dangerous.

Everyone's worried about lawsuits these days. If I could make it through the passage, then surely the others on the tour could have too. I was probably the least agile of our group.

The tour guide also led us down to the dungeon, where she switched off the lights—yes, there's electricity now—and she made us experience thirty seconds of total darkness. She spoke of a prisoner who'd been locked in the dungeon for one hundred years! She described this prisoner as a kind of holy man.

—

I'M DRINKING COFFEE NOW, BUT I used to be a tea drinker; some might even call me a tea snob, though I prefer the term *connoisseur*. After just one sip, I could have told you not only the variety of the tea but where it was grown, at what altitude, and possibly what wildflowers had been in the vicinity.

I think my acute sense of smell and of taste had a lot to do with my success. Intuition also played a part, but really, intuition is little more than paying attention to the world around you. While I may not have known why I made the choices I made, the knowledge was somewhere inside me.

Sadly, while my other faculties have remained intact, my senses of smell and taste have been greatly diminished. Only strong and bitter flavors can get through to me now. I prefer an onion to a fig. And, alas, I've had to switch from tea to espresso.





## THE FIRST TIGER

**I** WAS THERE WHEN THE first tiger was delivered to the castle. It arrived by horse-drawn cart. Two knights in full regalia rode along beside it, carrying the red, green, and black banner of Oxatania. In the sixteenth century, knights were only used for spectacle. Gunpowder had rendered them obsolete for warfare.

The tiger was inside an iron-and-wood box, with only a small slot for food. The box reeked after the three-day journey from Oxatania. Who knows how long it had been kept inside it before that? In 1523 kings and queens didn't concern themselves about the humane treatment of animals. To be fair, they weren't overly concerned about the humane treatment of humans either.

The tiger was a gift in anticipation of the upcoming wedding between Princess Tullia of Esquaveta and Prince Dalrympl of Oxatania. The marriage had been arranged twelve years earlier, when the princess was only three.

I had been in my workshop, dissecting beetles, when I was startled by a tug on my tunic. "I'm betrothed, Natto!" the three-year-old princess had proudly told me.

She couldn't pronounce the *L* in *Anatole*.

There was no door to the archway that separated my workshop from the castle corridor, but I'd hung two curtains made of beads and shells on either side of it. These not only added to my mystique as court magician, they

warned me if anyone was coming. Princess Tullia, however, had a way of slipping through the curtains without making a sound, often startling me.

“Congratulations!” I replied. “Who’s the lucky man?”

Her face scrunched up in confusion. *What man was I talking about?*

Since then, gifts had been sent back and forth between the two kingdoms. At first these were simple tokens of friendship, but as the wedding date drew closer, the gifts became increasingly extravagant, as each king tried to outdo the other.

When the tiger arrived, the wedding was only six months away. Once the Oxatanian knights had departed, King Sandro raised his hands to the heavens and bellowed, “What am I supposed to do with it?”

Queen Corinna, who had a predilection toward the unusual and exotic, suggested that the tiger be served at the wedding banquet. The kitchen steward immediately protested. He warned that tiger meat might be tough and stringy. In addition, the king worried that the Oxatanians might be insulted if we butchered their most generous gift.

An even bigger problem than what to do with it was how to reciprocate. That task fell to Dittierri, the king’s regent. I took secret pleasure in seeing the regent’s anguish as he fretted over finding the perfect gift.

But I had problems of my own. The day before the arrival of the tiger, twenty-two sacks of black sand had been brought to me from Iceland.

Xavier, the finance minister, had been with me when the sacks were hauled into my workshop. He was younger than me, with fiery red hair, but the pressures of his job had taken a toll. He had bags under his eyes and had developed a facial tic.

According to him, the kingdom of Esquaveta was on the verge of bankruptcy. All wages would have to be cut by half. A number of soldiers had already deserted.

We couldn’t squeeze out any more taxes from the *popolo minuto*. As it was, all land, crops, and livestock were considered the property of the king. If an ox or horse died, the peasant who had tended the animal was forced to

compensate the king for his loss. Similarly, if that peasant died, his family had to compensate the king for the loss of a worker.

These were dangerous times. We didn't dare let the French to the north or the Italian city-states to the south learn of our vulnerability. Even the pope maintained a mercenary army and was always looking to expand the Papal States.

We just needed to make it through the wedding, which would first be preceded by a lavish banquet, and then a weeklong festival. The marriage between Princess Tullia and Prince Dalrympl had been dubbed "the wedding of the century."

The wedding was more than a marriage between two people. It would be the union of two kingdoms.

We sophisticated Esquavetians had always looked down upon the crude and boorish Oxatanians. The stereotypical Oxatanian oaf was often the butt of our jokes. But the truth was, we desperately needed their fearsome army and their efficient economy.

—

INSIDE MY WORKSHOP, XAVIER SEEMED more like a shipping clerk than the finance minister, making careful note as each sack of black sand was unloaded. There was a nervous excitement in his manner, giving me the sense that in his mind, each sack was already filled with gold.

I cautioned Xavier that whatever gold I *might* be able to produce would necessarily weigh less than the sand. He shrugged off my concern, saying there was plenty more sand on the black beach of Iceland.

In hindsight, I should never have agreed to take on this project. My expertise was in the living world: plants, bugs, sea life, and animals. I had never applied my magic to rocks and minerals.



## DITTIERRI

**M**Y APPEARANCE WAS ROUGHLY the same then as it is now. I was forty years old, with a bit of a paunch and no hair.

By today's standards, I suppose I'd be considered short and dumpy, but in the sixteenth century the average height for a man was about five feet, seven inches. I was only three or four inches below that. A healthy plumpness was a sign of prosperity, as well as a hedge against famine.

By *no hair*, I'm not referring just to my head. My entire body was, and is, bald.

This was an unintended consequence of an early experiment, conducted long before I came to the castle. Who knows, it may have helped me get the job. What king wants an ordinary-looking magician?

I had been trying to find a way to limit human perspiration. Keep in mind my especially keen sense of smell and the fact that in the sixteenth century people didn't bathe as often as they do today. I wasn't so much offended by natural human odor as I was by the sickly-sweet powders and oils people used to try to mask it.

In a way, it could be said my experiments were successful. In addition to my hair loss, I also lost the capacity to sweat.