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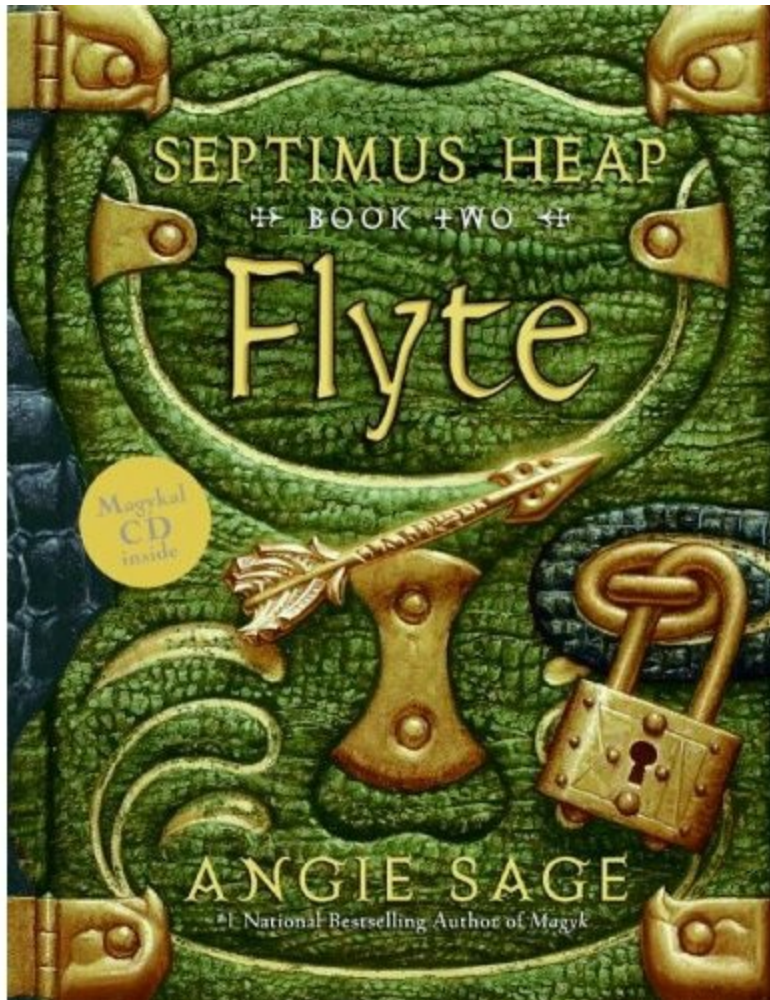
⇨ BOOK TWO ⇨

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Book Two of Septimus Heap

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The Year Before

On the Night of the Apprentice Supper

It is night on the Marram Marshes; a full moon shines down on the black waters and illuminates the nighttime **Things** who are going about their business. Silence hangs in the air, broken occasionally by the glugs and gurgles of the Quake Ooze as the creatures that live beneath it make their way to a feast. A huge ship with a full complement of sailors has sunk into the Ooze and the **Things** are hungry—but they will have to fight the Quake Ooze

Brownies for the leftovers. Every now and then a bubble of gas throws something from the ship up to the surface, and great planks and spars covered in a thick black tar float across the top of the Ooze.

Nighttime on the Marram Marshes is no time for a human being to be abroad, but in the distance, paddling steadily toward the ship, is a figure in a small canoe. His fair curly hair hangs limp in the damp marsh air, and his piercing green eyes stare angrily into the night as he mutters furiously to himself, replaying over and over a fierce argument he has had that very evening. But what does *he* care anymore? he asks himself. He is on his way to a new life, one where his talents will be recognized and not passed over in favor of an upstart nobody.

As he nears all that can be seen of the ship—a single mast sticking out of the Ooze topped with a limp and ragged red flag with a line of three black stars—he steers the canoe into a narrow channel that will take him to the very foot of the mast. He shivers, not with the cold, but from the feeling of fear that hangs in the air, and the thought that beneath him lies the ship's carcass, picked clean by the Quake Ooze Brownies. Now the debris is slowing him down. He propels the canoe forward until he is suddenly forced to a halt—there is something under the water blocking his path. He peers into the brackish sludge and can see nothing at first, but then ... then he sees something below him, ice-white in the moonlight. It is moving ... moving up through the water, and suddenly a skeleton, picked clean and bright by the Brownies, breaks the surface, sending a plume of black slime over the occupant of the canoe.

Shaking with a mixture of fear and excitement, the canoeist allows the skeleton to climb aboard and settle itself behind him, sticking its sharp kneecaps into his back. For he knows by the rings still on the bony fingers, that this is what he has been hoping to find—the skeleton of DomDaniel himself, **Necromancer**, twice ExtraOrdinary Wizard and, in the canoeist's opinion, a far superior Wizard to any he has met so far. And particularly



superior to the one he has just been forced to share an Apprentice Supper with.

The canoeist makes a deal with the skeleton. He will do all that he can to **Restore** him to life and to allow him to reclaim his rightful place in the Wizard Tower, if only the skeleton will accept him as his Apprentice.

With a nod of his bony skull, the skeleton agrees to the deal.

The canoe resumes its journey, directed by the somewhat impatient bony forefinger of the skeleton jabbing the canoeist in the back. At last they reach the edge of the Marsh, whereupon the skeleton climbs out of the canoe and leads the tall, fair-haired young man into the bleakest place he has ever been.

As the young man follows the shambling gait of the skeleton through a desolate landscape, the thought of what he has left behind briefly crosses his mind. But only briefly, for this is his new life now and he will show them all—and *then* they'll be sorry.

Especially when he becomes the ExtraOrdinary Wizard.

1

Spiders

Septimus Heap tipped six spiders into a jar,
screwed the lid down tight and put them outside
the door. Then he picked up his broom and
continued sweeping out the Pyramid Library. The
Library was cramped and dark. It was lit by a few
fat candles that spat and spluttered, and it smelled weird—a mixture of
incense, musty paper and moldy leather. Septimus loved it. It was a **Magykal**
place, perched right at the top of the Wizard Tower and hidden away deep
inside the golden Pyramid, which crowned the Tower. Outside, the
hammered gold of the Pyramid shimmered brightly in the early-morning sun.

After Septimus had finished sweeping, he made his way slowly along the shelves, humming happily to himself while he sorted out the **Magykal** books, parchments and spells that the ExtraOrdinary Wizard, Marcia Overstrand, had, as usual, left in a mess. Most eleven-and-a-half-year-old boys would rather have been out in the bright summer morning, but Septimus was where he wanted to be. He had spent quite enough summer mornings outside—and winter ones, come to that—in the first ten years of his life as Young Army soldier, Boy 412.

It was Septimus's job, as Apprentice to the ExtraOrdinary Wizard, to tidy the Library every morning. And every morning Septimus found something new and exciting. Often it was something that Marcia had left out especially for him: maybe a **Conjuration** that she had come across late at night and thought might interest him or a dog-eared old spell book that she had taken from one of the **Hidden** shelves. But today, Septimus reckoned he had found something for himself: it was stuck underneath a heavy brass candlestick and looked slightly disgusting—not the kind of thing that Marcia Overstrand would want to get her hands messy with. Very carefully he pried the sticky brown square off the bottom of the candlestick and put it in the palm of his hand. Septimus examined his find and felt excited—he was sure it was a **Taste Charm**. The thick, brown, square tablet looked like an old piece of chocolate; it smelled like an old piece of chocolate; and he was pretty sure it would taste like an old piece of chocolate too, although he wasn't going to risk it. There was a chance it might be a poison **Charm** that had dropped out of the large box labeled: TOXINS, VENOMS AND BASYK

BANES, which teetered unsteadily on the shelf above.

Septimus pulled out a small Enhancing Glass from his Apprentice belt and held it so that he could read the thin white writing that looped across the square. The words said:

Take me, shake me,

and I will make thee:

Quetzalcoatl's Tchocolatl.

Septimus grinned. He was right, but then he usually was when it came to **Magyk**. It *was* a **Taste Charm**—even better, it was a chocolate **Taste Charm**. Septimus knew just the person he wanted to give it to. Smiling to himself, he slipped the **Charm** into his pocket.

Septimus's work in the Library was nearly done. He climbed up the ladder to tidy the last shelf and suddenly found himself eye to eye with the biggest, hairiest spider he had ever seen. Septimus gulped; if it had not been for Marcia insisting on him removing every single spider that he found from the Library, he would happily have left this one alone. He was sure the spider's eight beady eyes were trying to stare him down, and he didn't like its long, hairy legs either. In fact all eight legs looked as though they were planning to run up his sleeve if he didn't grab the spider fast.

In a flash, Septimus had the spider in his hand. The creature scabbled angrily against his dusty fingers, trying to pry them open with its surprisingly powerful legs, but Septimus held on tight. Quickly he made his way down the ladder, passing the small hatch that led out onto the golden roof of the Pyramid. Just as he reached the bottom of the ladder, the spider bit the inside of his thumb.

"Ouch!" Septimus yelped.

He grabbed the spider jar, unscrewed the lid one-handed and dropped the creature in, much to the dismay of the six other spiders already there. Then, with his thumb beginning to throb, Septimus screwed the lid back on as tightly as he could. Careful not to drop the jar, in which six small spiders were now being chased around and around by one large hairy one, Septimus made a quick exit down the winding, narrow, stone stairs which led from the Library into the apartment of the ExtraOrdinary Wizard, Madam Marcia Overstrand.

Septimus hurried by the closed purple and gold door to Marcia's bedroom, past his own room, and then ran down some more steps and headed for the small potion room beside Marcia's study. He put down the jar of spiders and looked at his thumb. It wasn't a pretty sight; it had become a deep red color and some interesting blue blotches were beginning to appear on his hand. It also *hurt*. Septimus flipped open the Medicine Chest with his good hand and

found a tube of **Spider Balm**, the entire contents of which he squeezed over his thumb. It didn't seem to do much good. In fact it seemed to make it worse. Septimus stared at his thumb, which was swelling up like a small balloon and felt as though it might be about to explode.

Marcia Overstrand, whom Septimus had now been Apprenticed to for almost a year and a half, had found the spiders waiting for her on her triumphant return to the Wizard Tower after ousting the **Necromancer**, DomDaniel, from his brief second time as ExtraOrdinary Wizard. Marcia had oughly **Cleaned** the Tower of **Darke Magyk** and restored the **Magyk** to the Wizard Tower, but she could not get rid of the spiders. This had upset Marcia, for she knew that the spiders were a sure sign that **Darke Magyk** still lingered in the Tower.

At first, when Marcia came back to the Tower, she was too busy to notice anything amiss—apart from the spiders. She had, for the first time, an Apprentice to think about; she had the Heaps—who were now living up at the Palace—to deal with and a bunch of Ordinary Wizards to sort out and settle back into the Tower. But as Septimus's first summer at the Wizard Tower had drawn on, Marcia had begun to notice, out of the corner of her eye, a **Darkenesse** following her. At first she had thought she was imagining it, for every time she glanced back over her shoulder and had a proper look, there was nothing to be seen. It wasn't until Alther Mella, the ghost of Marcia's old tutor and ExtraOrdinary Wizard, had told her that he could see something too that Marcia knew she was not imagining things—

there *was* a **Darke Shadow** following her.

And so, for the last year, piece by piece, Marcia had been building a **ShadowSafe**, which was nearly finished. It stood in the corner of the room, a tangle of shiny black rods and bars made from Professor Weasal Van Klampff s special **Amalgam**. A strange black mist played around the bars of the **ShadowSafe**, and occasionally flashes of orange light leaped between them. But at last the **ShadowSafe** was nearly finished, and soon Marcia would be able to walk inside it with the **Shadow** following her and walk out again, leaving the **Shadow** behind. And that, Marcia hoped, would be the end of the **Darkenesse** in the Tower.