

*The Secrets of the Immortal
Nicholas Flamel*

MICHAEL SCOTT

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ENCHANTRESS



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The final conflict . . .



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About the Book

'The two that are one must become the one that is all. One to save the world, one to destroy it.'

Nicholas Flamel is near death, and John Dee has the swords of power. The future of the human race depends on the twins of prophecy. But will they stand together?

Join the teenage twins as they . . .

- Access extraordinary powers and learn shocking secrets
- Journey back in time to the lost city of Danu Talis
- Battle ancient monsters - and each other.

How will the legend end?

Step into the greatest legend of all time in the final action-packed thriller in the *New York Times* bestselling series.

The Secrets of the Immortal
Nicholas Flamoi

BOOK 6

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ENCHANTRESS



MICHAEL SCOTT

RHCP DIGITAL

To the memory of my father, Michael Scott.
Consummatum est.

Character profiles

Josh Newman

Josh Newman was born on December 21st 1991, just seconds after his twin sister, Sophie. Tall, athletic, with blond hair and blue eyes, Josh is quite impulsive, *hates* snakes, rats, spiders and scorpions and sometimes suffers from claustrophobia. After falling under the influence of Dr. John Dee and Virginia Dare, Josh has travelled back in time to Danu Talis, accompanied by Sophie. Josh's magical aura is gold, with a scent of orange.

Sophie Newman

Also blonde, with blue eyes, Sophie Newman tends to be more trusting and less quick to judge than her brother, Josh. However, lately she has become alarmed by his decision to stand by Dee, and is scared that she's losing him. The twins have just landed in the ancient city of Danu Talis, where they've been reunited with their parents. Sophie's magical aura is silver, with a scent of vanilla.

Nicholas Flamel

Nicholas Flamel was born in France in 1330 and is a powerful alchemist. He discovered the secret of immortality contained within the Book of Abraham, the Codex, which also contains the spell which would allow the Dark Elders to regain control of our world. After losing the Codex to Dr. John Dee, Nicholas and his wife have lost their immortality. They have only one day left to live. Nicholas's magical aura is green with a scent of peppermint.

Perenelle Flamel

Tall, elegant, with black hair and green eyes, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and over 600 years old, Perenelle Flamel is a powerful alchemyst and sorceress. However, since the Codex was stolen by Dee, she has grown weaker and is close to death. She and Nicholas must now make a last stand to defend San Francisco from the onslaught of diabolical creatures. Perry can see ghosts and her magical aura is white, without a specific scent.

Dr. John Dee

Originally magician and advisor to the Tudor queen, Elizabeth I, Dr. John Dee is an immortal who previously served the Dark Elders until he was declared a traitor. Having once been an apprentice to Nicholas Flamel, from whom he learned alchemy and other arcane secrets, Dee has an abiding hatred for Nicholas and Perenelle. Now that he has obtained the swords of power, he appears unstoppable in his quest to bring about the end of the world. His magical aura is yellow with a scent of brimstone.

Scathach

Also known as Scatty, this slight, athletic girl with spiky red hair appears to be about seventeen years old but has been in this world for millennia. She is both a Next Generation Elder and a vampire. She is an implacable foe while being capable of friendship. She, Joan of Arc and Saint-Germain have just escaped from the volcano prison in Danu Talis. Her magical aura is grey of unknown scent.

Joan of Arc

The history books will tell you that the heroine of France, Joan of Arc, was burned at the stake in 1431 at the age of nineteen. In fact, she was rescued in the last seconds by

her close friend, Scathach (see *The Death of Joan of Arc* ebook), and became an immortal. Joan is very slim, about Sophie's height, with auburn hair and grey eyes. Like Sophie, Joan's magical aura is silver, but with a scent of lavender.

Francis, Comte de Saint-Germain

The chart topping techno-music star, known to his legions of fans as "Germain", is in fact the immortal Francis, Comte de Saint-Germain. A performer since his time in the salons and theatres of 18th century London, Germain also spent time with Nicholas Flamel studying alchemy. He has long, curly black hair, blue eyes and tattoos of butterflies around his wrists. He is a self-professed master of Fire Magic and is married to Joan of Arc. His magical aura is red, with the scent of burnt leaves.

Niccolò Machiavelli

Methodical and calculating, the immortal Niccolò Machiavelli, once the most influential philosopher and politician in the 16th century, is now the head of the DGSE (*Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure*), the French external intelligence agency. However, along with his friend Billy the Kid, Machiavelli has decided to break the oath made to his Elder masters, making him a *waerloga* - a warlock. Machiavelli's magical aura is grey with the scent of snakes.

Abraham the Mage

Abraham is the enigmatic creator of the Codex. He is not human, nor Elder, nor Archon, and he is thought to be older than even the Earthlords. He lives on the island of Tor Ri in 'The King's Tower'. Due to a process known as the Change, his aura is hardening on his skin and he is gradually

turning into a living statue. He has the Sight and can see the strands of time. His magical aura is pure gold.

More information about the characters in these books can be found at <http://j.mp/flamelcharacters>

I am legend.

There was a time when I said that death had no claim over me, that illness could not touch me.

This is no longer true.

Now I know the date of my death, and that of my wife, too: and it is today.

I was born in the Year of Our Lord 1330, more than six hundred and seventy years ago. Long-lived, yes; immortal, too, but not invulnerable. Perenelle and I always knew this day would come.

I have had a good life, a long life, and have few regrets. I have been many things in my time: a physician and a cook, a bookseller and a soldier, a teacher of languages and chemistry, both an officer of the law and a thief.

And I was *the* Alchemyst.

Gifted—or was it cursed?—with immortality, Perenelle and I fought the evil of the Dark Elders and kept them at bay while we searched for the twins of legend, the Gold and Silver, the sun and moon. We always thought they would help us defend this planet.

We were wrong.

Now the end is upon us and the twins have vanished, gone back in time to the isle of Danu Talis, back ten thousand years, back to where it all begins. . . .

Today, the world ends.

Today, Perenelle and I will die, if not by the hand or claw of some Elder or monster, then by old age. My dear wife has extended my life by a single day, but at a terrible cost to herself.

And if there is some consolation, it is that we will die together.

But we are not dead yet, nor will we go down without a fight, for she is the Sorceress, and I am the immortal Nicholas Flamel, the Alchemyst.

*From the Day Booke of Nicholas Flamel, Alchemyst
Writ this day, Thursday, 7th June,
in San Francisco, my adopted city*

Thursday,
7th June

CHAPTER ONE

THE SMALL CRYSTAL mirror was ancient.

Older than mankind, it predated the Elders, the Archons and even the Ancients who had come before them. This was an Earthlord artifact, washed up when the Isle of Danu Talis was ripped from the primeval seabed.

For millennia the mirror had hung on a wall in a side room in the Palace of the Sun on Danu Talis. Generations of Great Elders, and then the Elders who had come after them, had puzzled over the small rectangle of crystal in the plain black frame that was not wood, not metal, nor was it stone. Although it had all the appearance of a mirror, it wasn't a true reflecting glass: its surface showed only shadows, though those who peered closely claimed they caught a hint of their skulls beneath their flesh, of the impressions of bones beneath skin. Occasionally—infrequently—some claimed to catch glimpses of distant landscapes, polar ice caps, expanses of deserts or steaming jungles.

At certain times of the year—at the fall and summer equinoxes—and during solar and lunar eclipses, the glass would shiver and show scenes of times and places beyond comprehension and understanding, exotic worlds of metal and chitin, places where there were no stars in the heavens and a black sun hung unmoving in the skies. Generations of scholars spent their entire lives trying to interpret those

scenes, yet even the legendary Abraham the Mage could not decipher its mysteries.

Then one day, when the Elder Quetzalcoatl was reaching out to straighten the glass, he had caught the side of his hand on the edge of the frame. He felt a sting and pulled away in surprise to see that he'd wounded himself. A single drop of blood splattered onto the crystal and suddenly the glass cleared, the surface rippling under the curling thread of sizzling blood. In that instant, Quetzalcoatl had seen wonders:

. . . the Isle of Danu Talis at the heart of a vast empire stretching unbroken across the globe . . .

. . . the Isle of Danu Talis burning and shattered, rent asunder by earthquakes, the great streets and massive buildings swallowed by the sea . . .

. . . the Isle of Danu Talis just visible beneath a sheath of ice, huge spike-nosed whales drifting over the entombed city . . .

. . . Danu Talis rising pure and golden in the center of a limitless desert . . .

The Elder had stolen the mirror that day and never returned it.

Now, slender and white-bearded, Quetzalcoatl spread a blue velvet cloth over a plain wooden table. He smoothed the cloth flat with a black-nailed hand, picking off threads and dust. Then he placed the black-framed rectangle of crystal in the center of the cloth and gently wiped it clean with the edge of his white linen shirt. The glass did not reflect the Elder's hawk-nosed face: the polished surface twisted with a gray smoke-scape.

Quetzalcoatl leaned over the glass, pulled a pin from the sleeve of his shirt and pressed the tip of the pin into the fleshy pad of his thumb. "By the pricking of my thumbs . . .," he muttered in the ancient language of the Toltec. A ruby droplet of blood slowly gathered on his smooth flesh.

“. . . something wicked, this way comes.” Holding his hand out over the glass, he allowed the drop to spatter onto the mirror. The surface instantly trembled and shimmered, the ancient crystal running with a rainbow of oily colors. Red smoke steamed off the glass; then the colors settled into images.

Millennia of experimentation and vast quantities of blood—very little of it his—had taught the Elder how to control the images in the crystal. He had fed it so much blood that he had come to believe that it was somehow sentient and alive. Staring into the glass, he murmured, “Take me to San Francisco.”

The mirror blurred, then washed with white and gray light, and suddenly Quetzalcoatl found himself floating high over the city, looking down over the bay.

“Why isn’t it burning?” he wondered aloud. “Why are there no monsters in the streets?” He had permitted the immortal humani Machiavelli and Billy the Kid to return to San Francisco in order to release the creatures on Alcatraz Island into the city. Had they failed in their mission? Or was he too early?

The image in the crystal shifted once again and settled on the narrow length of Alcatraz, and Quetzalcoatl spotted a line of movement in the water. A shape moved across the bay, leaving the smudge of Alcatraz and heading toward the city. Quetzalcoatl rubbed his hands together. No, he wasn’t too late: he was just in time to witness a little chaos. It had been a long time since he had seen a city destroyed, and he did love a spectacle.

The color image suddenly flickered and faded. The Elder pierced his finger with the pin again and then again, dripping more of his lifeblood onto the glass, feeding it. The mirror blinked to life once more and the image of the city re-formed, three-dimensional in its clarity. Quetzalcoatl focused and the image spun downward, pulling him toward choppy white-capped water. A creature lurked beneath the

waves, something huge and sinuous: a sea serpent. The Elder squinted. It was hard to make out any details, but it seemed as if the creature had more than one head. He nodded in approval; he liked that. It was a nice touch. It made sense to send the sea creatures to the city first. He smiled, showing savage teeth as he imagined the monster rampaging through the streets.

Quetzalcoatl watched the sea serpent sweep across the bay and curl toward one of the piers that jutted out into the water. He frowned and then nodded in understanding. It would crawl ashore on the Embarcadero. Excellent: lots of tourists, high profile.

Light shifted on the sea. He spotted the faintest shimmer of a blue and red oily stain on the water and abruptly realized that the sea serpent was heading straight for it.

Unconsciously, Quetzalcoatl dropped lower still. His head dipped toward the glass, hawk nose almost touching the surface. He could smell the sea now, salt with the faintest hint of rotting fish and seaweed . . . and something else. Closing his eyes, he breathed deeply. A city should smell of metal and traffic, burnt food and too many unwashed bodies. But what was he smelling here—these were odors that had no place in the city: the tartness of mint, the sweetness of aniseed, the flowery scent of green tea.

Realization struck him as the monstrous creature—the Lotan—rose from the sea, seven heads darting toward the swirling red and blue stain on the water. Quetzalcoatl recognized the auras and the colors now: the red was Prometheus, while the blue was the immortal humani Niten. And the sickening odor of mint in the air could belong to only one man: the Alchemyst, Nicholas Flamel.

Quetzalcoatl saw them then, standing on the end of a pier. And yes, the woman was there also, Perenelle the Sorceress, whom he knew from bitter experience. His

tongue automatically found the space in his teeth where she'd knocked out one of his big back molars. This was not good, this was not good at all: a renegade Elder and three of the most dangerous and deadly humani in the Shadowrealm.

Quetzalcoatl's hands clenched into tight fists, razor-sharp nails biting into the flesh of his palms, dripping thin blood onto the glass, keep the images alive. His dark eyes watched unblinkingly.

. . . the Lotan turning to feed on the auras . . .

. . . the creature rising from the water, balancing on its tail, all seven heads darting in to feed, mouths agape . . .

. . . the flash of green fire and the overwhelming stink of mint.

"No!" the Elder hissed as he watched the Lotan transform into a small blue-veined egg. He saw the egg drop into the Alchemyst's outstretched hand. Flamel tossed it triumphantly in the air . . . and a circling seagull snatched it and swallowed it whole.

"No! Nonononono . . ." Quetzalcoatl howled his rage, his face darkening, contorting into the flat serpent image that had terrified the Maya and the Aztec. Ragged teeth jutted from his mouth, his eyes narrowed and his dark hair stiffened in spikes about his face. He pounded on the table, the ancient wood cracking and only his lightning-fast reflexes saved the mirror from falling to the floor and shattering.

As quickly as it had begun, the rage passed.

Quetzalcoatl breathed deeply and ran a hand through his stiff hair, flattening it. All Billy and Machiavelli had to do was to release a few monsters into the city—three or four would have sufficed. Two would have been fine; even one, preferably something big with scales and teeth, would have been a start. But they'd failed, and they would pay for that failure later—if they survived!

He needed to get the beasts off the island, but to do that he would have to keep the Flamels and their Elder and immortal friends busy.

It was obviously time now for Quetzalcoatl to take matters into his own hands. A sudden smile revealed the Elder's needlelike teeth. He had collected a few pets in his Shadowrealm—the humani would call them monsters—and he could allow them out to play. But no doubt the Alchemyst would deal with them in the same way he'd dealt with the Lotan. No, he needed something bigger, something much more dramatic than a few mangy monsters.

Quetzalcoatl found his cell phone on the kitchen table. He dialed the Los Angeles number from memory. It rang fifteen times before it was answered with a snarling rasp. "Do you still have that bag of teeth I sold you millennia ago?" Quetzalcoatl started in. "I'd like to buy it back. Why? I want to use it to teach the Flamels a lesson . . . and of course keep them busy while I get our creatures off the island," he added hastily. "How much for the bag? Free! Well, yes, of course you can watch. Meet me at Vista Point; I'll make sure there are no humani around."

"Something wicked this way comes . . .," Quetzalcoatl whispered. "Heading your way, Alchemyst. Heading your way."

CHAPTER TWO

SOPHIE NEWMAN OPENED her eyes. She was lying facedown on grass that was too green to be natural and had the texture of silk. Crushed beneath her face were flowers the likes of which had never grown on the earth, tiny creations of spun glass and hardened resin.

She rolled over on her back and looked up . . . and then immediately squeezed her eyes shut again. A moment ago, she had been on Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay, the cool salt-scented air stinking with raw power and the zoolike odors of too many beasts crammed together. Now the air was clean and crisp, filled with exotic smells, and the sun was warm on her face, searing blinding afterimages on her retinas. She opened her eyes again and watched a shape move across the face of the sun. Squinting, she made out an oval of crystal and metal. "Oh!" she breathed, surprised, and reached over to nudge her twin. "You better wake up. . . ."

Josh was lying on his back. He opened one eye and groaned as the sunlight hit his face, and then, when the realization of what he'd just seen sank in, he snapped awake and sat bolt upright. "That's a . . ."

". . . a flying saucer," Sophie finished.

There was movement behind them and they both turned to see they were not alone on the grassy hillside. Dr. John Dee was on his hands and knees, staring wide-eyed into the

sky, while Virginia Dare sat cross-legged beside him, jet-black hair rippling in the wind.

"A vimana," Dee breathed. "I never thought I'd see one in my lifetime." He crouched on the grass, staring in awe at the fast-approaching object.

"Is this a Shadowrealm?" Josh asked, looking from Dee to Dare.

The woman shook her head slightly. "No, this is no Shadowrealm."

Josh stood and shaded his eyes, staring at the craft, mesmerized. As the vimana drew closer, he could see that it was made from what appeared to be a milky crystal encircled by a thick band of gold. The saucer dipped and dropped to the ground, filling the air with a low subsonic buzzing that fell to a deep rumbling as it hovered inches over the grass.

Sophie climbed to her feet and stood alongside her twin. "It's beautiful," she whispered. "It's like a jewel." The opalescent crystal was flawless, and the gold rim of the vehicle was inscribed with tiny sticklike characters.

"Where are we, Josh?" Sophie whispered.

Josh shook his head. "Not where . . . *when*," he murmured. "Vimanas belong to the oldest of all the myths."

Without a sound, the top half of the oval flipped open and the side of the craft retracted, revealing a blinding white interior.

A man and a woman appeared in the opening.

Tall and slender with deeply tanned skin, they both wore white ceramic armor etched with patterns, pictographs and hieroglyphs from a score of languages. The woman wore her black hair short, in a style cropped close to her head, whereas the man's skull was smooth shaven. Their eyes were a bright, brilliant blue, and when they smiled, their teeth were small and perfectly white, except for the incisors, which looked unnaturally long and sharp. Hand in hand, they stepped off the vimana and walked across the

grass. The glass and resin flowers melted to globules beneath their feet.

Unconsciously Sophie and Josh stepped back, squinting against the low sun and the blinding reflection off the couple's armor, trying to make out their features. There was something so terribly familiar. . . .

Suddenly Dee gasped, then drew in his arms and legs, trying to make himself as small as possible. "Masters," he said. "Forgive me."

The couple ignored him. They continued on their path, staring at the twins pointedly, until their heads blocked the sunlight, revealing their features in a halo of light.

"Sophie," the man said, bright blue eyes twinkling with delight.

"Josh," the woman added, shaking her head slightly, lips curling into a smile. "We've been waiting for you."

"Mom? Dad?" the twins said simultaneously. They took another step backward, confused and frightened now.

The couple bowed formally. "In this place we are called Isis and Osiris. Welcome to Danu Talis, children." They stretched out their hands. "Welcome home."

The twins looked at one another, eyes and mouths wide in fear and confusion. Sophie reached out and gripped her brother's arm. Despite a week of extraordinary revelations, this was almost too much to take in. She tried to form words and ask questions, but her mouth was dry, and her tongue felt thick and swollen.

Josh kept looking from his father to his mother and back again, trying to make some sense of what he was seeing. The couple looked like his parents, Richard and Sara Newman. They sure sounded like them too, but his parents were in Utah . . . he'd spoken to his father only a few days ago. They'd talked about a horned dinosaur from the Cretaceous period.

"I know this is a lot to take in," Richard Newman—Osiris—said with a grin.

“But trust us,” Sara—Isis—said, “it will all make sense.” Her voice was reassuring as she smiled at the boy and girl. “All your lives have been leading up to this moment. This, children, is your destiny. This is your day. And what have we always said about the day?” she asked, smiling.

“Carpe diem,” they both responded automatically. “Seize the day.”

“What—” Josh began.

Isis raised her hand. “In time. All in good time. And trust us—this is a good time. This is the best of times. You have stepped back ten thousand years into your past.”

Sophie and Josh looked at one another. After everything they’d been through, they knew they should be delighted to be reunited with their parents, but there was something terribly wrong here. They had a hundred questions . . . and the two people standing in front of them hadn’t exactly answered any of them.

Dr. John Dee scrambled to his feet and fastidiously brushed himself off before pushing past the twins and bowing deeply to the white-armored couple. “Masters. I am honored—deeply honored—to stand in your presence again.” He raised his head to look from face to face. “And I trust you will acknowledge that I was instrumental in bringing the twins of legend to you.”

Osiris looked at Dee, flashing a ghost of the smile he’d shown the twins. “Ah, the dependable Dr. Dee, always the opportunist . . .” He stretched out his right hand, palm downward, and the Magician scrambled to take it in both of his and press his lips to the back of the fingers. “. . . and ever the fool.”

Dee looked up quickly and attempted to pull away, but Osiris had caught his hand. “I have always—” the Magician began in alarm.

“—been a fool,” Isis snapped.

A shadow crossed Osiris’s face, and as his lips drew back from sharp white teeth, it transformed in an instant

into a cruel mask. The shaven-headed man suddenly took hold of Dee's head on either side, thumbs on the immortal's cheekbones, and pulled him up until the human's feet left the ground. "And what use have we for a fool . . . or worse, a flawed tool!" Osiris's blue eyes were level with the Magician's. "Do you remember the day I made you immortal, Dee?" he whispered.

The doctor started to struggle, eyes suddenly wide with terror. "No," he gasped.

"When I told you I could make you human again?" Osiris said. "*Athanasia-aisanahta*," he breathed, and then he flung the Magician away from him.

The Magician sailed through the air, and by the time he hit the ground at Virginia Dare's feet, he was an old man: a shriveled, wizened bundle of rags, face lost in wrinkles, gray hair scattered in clumps on the silken grass around him, eyes milky white behind cataracts, lips blue, teeth loose in his gums.

Sophie and Josh looked in horror at the creature who only moments before had been a vibrant human. Now he was ancient beyond belief, but still alive, still aware. Sophie turned back to stare at the man who looked like her father, who sounded like him . . . and realized that she did not know him at all. Her father—Richard Newman—was a loving, gentle man. He would have been incapable of such casual cruelty.

Osiris saw the look on Sophie's face. "Judge me when you are in possession of all the facts," he said icily.

"Sophie, something you haven't learned yet is that there are times when pity is a weakness," Isis said.

Sophie started to shake her head. She didn't agree. And although the voice was Sara Newman's, the sentiment was not. Sophie had always known her mother to be one of the kindest and most generous of people.

"The doctor has never been worthy of pity. This is the man who killed thousands in his search for the Codex, the

man whose ambition sacrificed nations. This is the man who would have slain you both without a second thought. You must remember, Sophie, that not all monsters wear bestial shapes. Don't waste your pity on the likes of Dr. John Dee."

Even as the woman was speaking, Sophie caught flickering hints of the Witch of Endor's memories about the couple known as Isis and Osiris. And the Witch despised them both.

With a tremendous effort, Dee raised his left hand toward his masters. "I served you for centuries . . .," he croaked. The effort exhausted him and he fell back on the grass. His wrinkled skin had tightened across his head, emphasizing the skull beneath.

Isis ignored him. She looked at Virginia Dare, who had remained unmoving throughout the brief encounter. "Immortal: the world is about to change beyond all recognition. Those who are not with us are against us. And those who stand against us will die. Where do you stand, Virginia Dare?"

The woman gracefully climbed to her feet, twirling her wooden flute lightly in her left hand, leaving a single note shimmering on the air. "The doctor promised me a world," she said. "What do *you* offer?"

Isis moved and the sunlight blazed white off her armor. "Are you attempting to bargain with us?" The Elder's voice began to rise. "You are in no position to negotiate!"

Dare spun the wooden flute again and the air shivered with an unearthly keening. All around them the glass flowers shattered to dust. "I am not Dee," Virginia said icily. "I neither respect you nor like you. I am certainly not afraid of you." She tilted her head to one side, looking from Isis to Osiris. "And you should remember what happened to the last Elder who threatened me."

"You can have your world," Osiris said quickly, reaching out to rest his hand on his wife's shoulder.

“Which world?”

“Any world you wish,” he said, a broken smile fixed on his face. “We will need someone to act as a replacement for Dee.”

Virginia Dare stepped daintily over the ancient wheezing man. “I will do that. Temporarily, at least,” she added.

“Temporarily?” Osiris smiled.

“Until I get my world.”

“You will have it.”

“Then we are done and I will never see you again, nor will you ever bother me.”

“You have our word.”

Isis and Osiris turned to the twins and held out their hands again, yet neither Sophie nor Josh made any attempt to take them. “Come now,” Isis said, a touch of impatience in her voice, making her sound like the Sara Newman they knew. “We need to go. There is much to do.”

Neither twin moved.

“We need some answers,” Josh said defiantly. “You can’t just expect us to—”

“We will answer all your questions, I promise you,” Isis interrupted. She turned away and the warmth in her voice disappeared. “We must go now.”

Virginia Dare was about to step past the twins, when she stopped and looked at Josh. “If Isis and Osiris are your parents . . . what does that make you?” she asked. She glanced over her shoulder at Dee, then turned away to walk toward the crystal ship.

Sophie looked at her brother. “Josh . . .,” she started.

“I have no idea what’s going on, Sis,” he said, answering her unspoken question.

A dry, rasping cough drew their attention back to Dee. Although the sun was blazing in the sky and the air was warm, the ancient man had curled up in a ball and was shivering violently, arms wrapped around his body for warmth. They could hear his teeth rattle in his head.

Without a word, Sophie pulled off her red hooded fleece and handed it to her brother. He looked at it for a moment, then nodded and stepped forward to kneel down beside Dee. Gently he draped the fleece over the Magician, tucking it in around his shoulders. The Magician nodded his thanks, his white eyes wet with emotion, and clutched the fleece to himself tightly.

"I'm sorry," Josh said. He knew what Dee was, knew what he was capable of, but no one deserved to die like this. He looked over his shoulder. Isis and Osiris were climbing into the vimana. "You can't just leave him like this," he called.

"Why? Would you rather I kill him, Josh?" Osiris asked with a laugh. "Is that what you want? Dee, is that what you want? I can kill you now."

"No," Josh and Dee said simultaneously.

"His four hundred and eighty years are catching up with him, that's all. He will die of natural causes soon."

"It's cruel," Sophie said.

"To be honest, considering the trouble he's caused us over the past few days, I think I'm being rather merciful."

Josh turned back to Dee. The old man's withered lips moved, his breath coming in great heaving gasps. "Go." A clawlike hand wrapped around Josh's wrist. "And when in doubt, Josh," he whispered, "follow your heart. Words can be false, images and sounds can be manipulated. But this . . ." He tapped Josh's chest. "This is always true." He touched the boy's chest again, and the sound of paper crackling under his red 49ers Faithful T-shirt was clearly audible. "Oh no, no, no." The Magician's face fell. "Tell me that's not the missing pages from the Codex," he whispered, voice cracking.

Josh nodded. "It is."

Dee erupted in what began as a laugh, but the effort sent a wracking cough through his body and he folded in on

himself, struggling to catch his breath. “You had them all along,” he murmured.

Josh nodded again. “Right from the beginning.”

Shaking with silent laughter, Dee closed his eyes and lay back on the silken grass. “What an apprentice you would have made,” he breathed.

Josh watched the dying immortal until, finally, Osiris interrupted. “Josh,” he said firmly. “Leave him. We must go now—we have a world to save.”

“Which world?” Sophie and Josh asked simultaneously,
“All of them,” Isis and Osiris replied together.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SCREAMS WERE piercing.

A flock of parrots, green-bodied and red-faced Cherry-Headed Conures, swooped low over the Embarcadero in San Francisco. They buzzed past the three men and the woman standing at the wooden rail by the water's edge. The shrill, high-decibel shrieking echoed through the late-afternoon air. One of the men, bigger and more muscular than the others, pressed his hands to his ears.

"I hate parrots," Prometheus grumbled. "Noisy, filthy—"

"Poor things; they're upset." Nicholas Flamel didn't let the Elder finish his complaint. His nostrils flared as he breathed deeply. "They sense the auras in the air."

Prometheus dropped a heavy hand on the Alchemist's shoulder. "I've nearly been eaten by a seven-headed sea monster. I'm a little upset myself, but you don't hear me screaming about it."

The third man, slender and black-suited, with delicate Japanese features, looked up into Prometheus's broad lined face. "No, but you *will* grumble about it for the rest of the day."

"If we survive the rest of the day," Prometheus muttered. A parrot flew by, close enough to ruffle the Elder's graying hair, and a spatter of sticky white appeared on the big man's checked shirt. His face wrinkled into a