

Michael Scott

THE ALCHEMYST

The Secrets of
THE IMMORTAL
NICHOLAS FLAMEL



CHAPTER SAMPLER

I am legend.

Death has no claim over me, illness cannot touch me. Look at me now and it would be hard to put an age upon me, and yet I was born in the Year of Our Lord 1330, more than six hundred and seventy years ago.

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.

But before all these I was an alchemist. I was *the* Alchemist.

I was acknowledged as the greatest Alchemist of all, sought after by kings and princes, by emperors and even the Pope himself. I could turn ordinary metal into gold, I could change common stones into precious jewels. More than this: I discovered the secret of Life Eternal hidden deep in a book of ancient magic.

Now my wife, Perenelle, has been kidnapped and the book stolen.

Without the book, she and I will age. Within the full cycle of the moon, we will wither and die. And if we die, then the evil we have so long fought against will triumph. The Elder Race will reclaim this Earth again, and they will wipe humanity from the face of this planet.

But I will not go down without a fight.

For I am the immortal Nicholas Flamel.

*From the Day Booke of Nicholas Flamel, Alchemist
Writ this day, Thursday, 31st May, in
San Francisco, my adopted city*



THURSDAY,

31st May

CHAPTER ONE

“Of—answer me this: why would anyone want to wear an overcoat in San Francisco in the middle of summer?” Sophie Newman pressed her fingers against the Bluetooth earpiece as she spoke.

On the other side of the continent, her fashion-conscious friend Elle inquired matter-of-factly, “What sort of coat?”

Wiping her hands on the cloth tucked into her apron strings, Sophie moved out from behind the counter of the empty coffee shop and stepped up to the window, watching men emerge from the car across the street. “Heavy black wool overcoats. They’re even wearing black gloves and hats. And sunglasses.” She pressed her face against the glass. “Even for this city, that’s just a little *too* weird.”

“Maybe they’re undertakers?” Elle suggested, her voice popping and clicking on the cell phone. Sophie could hear

something loud and dismal playing in the background—*Lacrimosa* maybe, or *Amorphis*. Elle had never quite got over her Goth phase.

“Maybe,” Sophie answered, sounding unconvinced. She’d been chatting on the phone with her friend when, a few moments earlier, she’d spotted the unusual-looking car. It was long and sleek and looked as if it belonged in an old black-and-white movie. As it drove past the window, sunlight reflected off the blacked-out windows, briefly illuminating the interior of the coffee shop in warm yellow-gold light, blinding Sophie. Blinking away the black spots dancing before her eyes, she watched as the car turned at the bottom of the hill and slowly returned. Without signaling, it pulled over directly in front of *The Small Book Shop*, right across the street.

“Maybe they’re Mafia,” Elle suggested dramatically. “My dad knows someone in the Mafia. But he drives a Prius,” she added.

“This is most definitely not a Prius,” Sophie said, looking again at the car and the two large men standing on the street bundled up in their heavy overcoats, gloves and hats, their eyes hidden behind overlarge sunglasses.

“Maybe they’re just cold,” Elle suggested. “Doesn’t it get cool in San Francisco?”

Sophie Newman glanced at the clock and thermometer on the wall over the counter behind her. “It’s two-fifteen here . . . and eighty-one degrees,” she said. “Trust me, they’re not cold. They must be dying. Wait,” she said, interrupting herself, “something’s happening.”

The rear door opened and another man, even larger than

the first two, climbed stiffly out of the car. As he closed the door, sunlight briefly touched his face and Sophie caught a glimpse of pale, unhealthy-looking gray-white skin. She adjusted the volume on the earpiece. “OK. You should see what just climbed out of the car. A huge guy with gray skin. Gray. That might explain it; maybe they have some type of skin condition.”

“I saw a National Geographic documentary about people who can’t go out in the sun . . . ,” Elle began, but Sophie was no longer listening to her.

A fourth figure stepped out of the car.

He was a small, rather dapper-looking man, dressed in a neat charcoal-gray three-piece suit that looked vaguely old-fashioned but that she could tell had been tailor-made for him. His iron gray hair was pulled back from an angular face into a tight ponytail, while a neat triangular beard, mostly black but flecked with gray, concealed his mouth and chin. He moved away from the car and stepped under the striped awning that covered the trays of books outside the shop. When he picked up a brightly colored paperback and turned it over in his hands, Sophie noticed that he was wearing gray gloves. A pearl button at the wrist winked in the light.

“They’re going into the bookshop,” she said into her earpiece.

“Is Josh still working there?” Elle immediately asked.

Sophie ignored the sudden interest in her friend’s voice. The fact that her best friend liked her twin brother was just a little too weird. “Yeah. I’m going to call him to see what’s up. I’ll call you right back.” She hung up, pulled out the earpiece and absently rubbed her hot ear as she stared, fascinated, at the small man. There was something about

him . . . something *odd*. Maybe he was a fashion designer, she thought, or a movie producer, or maybe he was an author—she'd noticed that some authors liked to dress up in peculiar outfits. She'd give him a few minutes to get into the shop, then she'd call her twin for a report.

Sophie was about to turn away when the gray man suddenly spun around and seemed to stare directly at her. As he stood under the awning, his face was in shadow, and yet for just the briefest instant, his eyes looked as if they were glowing.

Sophie knew—*just knew*—that there was no possible way for the small gray man to see her: she was standing on the opposite side of the street behind a pane of glass that was bright with reflected early-afternoon sunlight. She would be invisible in the gloom behind the glass.

And yet . . .

And yet in that single moment when their eyes met, Sophie felt the tiny hairs on the back of her hands and along her forearms tingle and felt a puff of cold air touch the back of her neck. She rolled her shoulders, turning her head slightly from side to side, strands of her long blond hair curling across her cheek. The contact lasted only a second before the small man looked away, but Sophie got the impression that he had looked directly at her.

In the instant before the gray man and his three overdressed companions disappeared into the bookshop, Sophie decided that she did not like him.



Peppermint.

And rotten eggs.

“That is just vile.” Josh Newman stood in the center of the bookstore’s cellar and breathed deeply. Where *were* those smells coming from? He looked around at the shelves stacked high with books and wondered if something had crawled in behind them and died. What else would account for such a foul stink? The tiny cramped cellar always smelled dry and musty, the air heavy with the odors of parched curling paper, mingled with the richer aroma of old leather bindings and dusty cobwebs. He loved the smell; he always thought it was warm and comforting, like the scents of cinnamon and spices that he associated with Christmas.

Peppermint.

Sharp and clean, the smell cut through the close cellar atmosphere. It was the odor of new toothpaste or those herbal teas his sister served in the coffee shop across the street. It sliced through the heavier smells of leather and paper, and was so strong that it made his sinuses tingle; he felt as if he was going to sneeze at any moment. He quickly pulled out his iPod earbuds. Sneezing with headphones on was not a good idea: made your ears pop.

Eggs.

Foul and stinking—he recognized the sulfurous odor of rotten eggs. It blanketed the clear odor of mint . . . and it was disgusting. He could feel the stench coating his tongue and lips, and his scalp began to itch as if something were crawling through it. Josh ran his fingers through his shaggy blond hair and shuddered. The drains must be backing up.

Leaving the earbuds dangling over his shoulders, he checked the book list in his hand, then looked at the shelves again: *The Complete Works of Charles Dickens*, twenty-seven volumes, red leather binding. Now where was he going to find that?

Josh had been working in the bookshop for nearly two months and still didn't have the faintest idea where anything was. There was no filing system . . . or rather, there *was* a system, but it was known only to Nick and Perry Fleming, the owners of The Small Book Shop. Nick or his wife could put their hands on any book in either the shop upstairs or the cellar in a matter of minutes.

A wave of peppermint, immediately followed by rotten eggs, filled the air again; Josh coughed and felt his eyes water. This was impossible! Stuffing the book list into one pocket of his jeans and the headphones into the other, he maneuvered his way through the piled books and stacks of boxes, heading for the stairs. He couldn't spend another minute down there with the smell. He rubbed the heels of his palms against his eyes, which were now stinging furiously. Grabbing the stair rail, he pulled himself up. He needed a breath of fresh air or he was going to throw up—but, strangely, the closer he came to the top of the stairs, the stronger the odors became.

He popped his head out of the cellar door and looked around.

And in that instant, Josh Newman realized that the world would never be the same again.



CHAPTER TWO

Josh peered over the edge of the cellar, eyes watering with the stink of sulfur and mint. His first impression was that the usually quiet shop was crowded: four men facing Nick Fleming, the owner, three of them huge and hulking, one smaller and sinister-looking. Josh immediately guessed that the shop was being robbed.

His boss, Nick Fleming, stood in the middle of the bookshop, facing the others. He was a rather ordinary-looking man. Average height and build, with no real distinguishing features, except for his eyes, which were so pale that they were almost completely colorless. His black hair was cropped close to his skull and he always seemed to have stubble on his chin, as if he hadn't shaved for a couple of days. He was dressed as usual in simple black jeans, a loose black T-shirt advertising a concert that had taken place twenty-five years earlier and a pair of battered cowboy boots. There was a cheap digital watch on his

left wrist and a heavy silver-link bracelet on his right, alongside two tatty multicolored friendship bracelets.

Facing him was a small gray man in a smart suit.

Josh realized that they were not speaking . . . and yet something was going on between them. Both men were standing still, their arms close to their bodies, elbows tucked in, open palms turned upward. Nick was in the center of the shop, while the gray man was standing close to the door, his three black-coated companions around him. Strangely, both men's fingers were moving, twitching, dancing, as if they were typing furiously, thumb brushing against forefinger, little finger touching thumb, index and little finger extended. Tendrils and wisps of green mist gathered in Fleming's palms, then curled in ornate patterns and drifted onto the floor, where they writhed like serpents. Foul, yellow-tinged smoke coiled and dripped from the gray man's gloved hands, spattering onto the wooden floor like dirty liquid.

The stench rolled off the smoke, thickening the atmosphere with the scent of peppermint and sulfur. Josh felt his stomach twist and lurch and he swallowed hard; the rotten-egg smell was enough to make him gag.

The air between the two men shimmered with tendrils of green and yellow smoke, and where they touched, sparks hissed and sizzled. Fleming's fingers moved, and a long fist-thick coil of green smoke appeared in the palm of his hand. He blew on it, a quick hissing breath, and it spun up into the air, twisting and untwisting at head height between the two men. The gray man's short, stubby fingers tapped out their own rhythm and a yellow ball of energy spun from his hands and bobbed away. It touched the coil of green smoke, which

immediately wrapped around the ball. There was a sparking *snap* . . . and the invisible explosion blew both men backward across the room, sending them crashing across the tables of books. Lightbulbs popped and fluorescents shattered, raining powdery glass onto the floor. Two of the windows exploded outward, while another dozen of the small square panes shattered and spiderwebbed.

Nick Fleming tumbled to the floor, close to the opening to the cellar, almost landing on top of Josh, who was standing frozen on the steps, wide-eyed with shock and horror. As Nick clambered to his feet, he pushed Josh back down the stairs. "Stay down, whatever happens, stay down," he hissed, his English touched with an indefinable accent. He straightened as he turned and Josh saw him turn his right palm upward, bring it close to his face and blow into it. Then he made a throwing motion toward the center of the room, as if he were lobbing a ball.

Josh craned his neck to follow the movement. But there was nothing to see . . . and then it was as if all the air had been sucked out of the room. Books were suddenly ripped from the nearby shelves, drawn into an untidy heap in the center of the floor; framed prints were dragged from the walls; a heavy woolen rug curled upward and was sucked into the center of the room.

Then the heap exploded.

Two of the big men in black overcoats caught the full force of the explosion. Josh watched as books, some heavy and hard, others soft and sharp, flew around them like angry birds. He winced in sympathy as one man took the full force of a dictionary in the face. It knocked away his hat and sunglasses . . .

revealing dead-looking, muddy, gray skin and eyes like polished black stones. A shelf of romance novels battered against his companion's face, snapping the cheap sunglasses in two. Josh discovered that he, too, had eyes that looked like stones.

And he suddenly realized that they *were* stones.

He was turning to Nick Fleming, a question forming on his lips, when his boss glanced at him. "Stay down," he commanded. "He's brought Golems." Fleming ducked as the gray man sent three long spearlike blades of yellow energy across the room. They sliced through bookshelves and stabbed into the wooden floor. Everything they touched immediately started to rot and putrefy. Leather bindings snapped and cracked, paper blackened, wooden floorboards and shelves turned dry and powdery.

Fleming tossed another invisible ball into the corner of the room. Josh Newman followed the motion of his boss's arm. As the unseen ball sailed through the air, a shaft of sunlight caught it, and for an instant, he saw it glow green and faceted, like an emerald globe. Then it moved out of the sunlight and vanished again. This time when it hit the floor, the effect was even more dramatic. There was no sound, but the entire building shook. Tables of cheap paperbacks dissolved into matchwood, and slivers of paper filled the air with bizarre confetti. Two of the men in black—the Golems—were slammed back against the shelves, bringing books tumbling down on top of them, while a third—the biggest—was pushed so hard against the door that he was propelled out onto the street.

And in the silence that followed came the sound of gloved hands clapping. "You have perfected that technique, I see, Nicholas." The gray man spoke English with a curious lilt.

“I’ve been practicing, John,” Nick Fleming said, sliding toward the open cellar door, shoving Josh Newman farther down the stairs. “I knew you would catch up with me sooner or later.”

“We’ve been looking for you for a very long time, Nicholas. You’ve got something of ours. And we want it back.”

A sliver of yellow smoke bit into the ceiling above Fleming’s and Josh’s heads. Bubbling, rotten black plaster drifted down like bitter snowflakes.

“I burned it,” Fleming said, “burned it a long time ago.” He pushed Josh even farther into the cellar, then pulled the sliding door closed, sealing them both in. “Don’t ask,” he warned, his pale eyes shining in the gloom. “Not now.” Catching Josh by the arm, Nick pulled him into the darkest corner of the bookstore cellar, caught a section of shelving in both hands and jerked it forward. There was a click, and the shelving swung outward, revealing a set of steps hidden behind it. Fleming urged Josh forward into the gloom. “Quickly now, quickly and quietly,” he warned. He followed Josh into the opening and pulled the shelves closed behind him just as the cellar door turned into a foul black liquid and flowed down the stairs with the most appalling stench of sulfur.

“Up.” Nick Fleming’s voice was warm against Josh’s ear. “This comes out in the empty shop next door to ours. We have to hurry. It’ll take Dee only a few moments to realize what’s happened.”

Josh Newman nodded; he knew the shop. The dry cleaner’s had been empty all summer. He had a hundred questions, and none of the answers that ran through his mind was satisfactory, since most of them contained that one awful

word in them: *magic*. He had just watched two men toss balls and spears of something—of *energy*—at each other. He had witnessed the destruction those energies had caused.

Josh had just witnessed magic.

But of course, everyone knew that magic simply did not and could not exist.



CHAPTER THREE

*W*hat was that disgusting smell?

Sophie Newman was just about to press the Bluetooth headset back into her ear when she breathed deeply and paused, nostrils flaring. She'd just smelled something awful. Closing her phone and pushing her headset into a pocket, she leaned over the open jar of dark tea leaves and inhaled.

She had been working in The Coffee Cup since she and her brother had arrived in San Francisco for the summer. It was an OK job, nothing special. Most of the customers were nice, a few were ignorant and one or two were downright rude, but the hours were fine, the pay was good, the tips were better and the shop had the added advantage of being just across the road from where her twin brother worked. They had turned fifteen last December and had already started to save for their own car. They estimated it would take them

at least two years—if they bought no CDs, DVDs, games, clothes or shoes, which were Sophie’s big weakness.

Usually, there were two other staff on duty with her, but one had gone home sick earlier, and Bernice, who owned the shop, had left after the lunchtime rush to go to the wholesalers’ to stock up on fresh supplies of tea and coffee. She had promised to be back in an hour; Sophie knew it would take at least twice that.

Over the summer, Sophie had grown used to the smells of the different exotic teas and coffee the shop sold. She could tell her Earl Grey from her Darjeeling, and knew the difference between Javanese and Kenyan coffee. She enjoyed the smell of coffee, though she hated the bitter taste of it. But she loved tea. In the past couple of weeks she had been gradually sampling all the teas, particularly the herbal teas with their fruity tastes and unusual aromas.

But now something smelled foul and disgusting.

Almost like rotten eggs.

Sophie brought a tin of loose tea to her face and breathed deeply. The crisp odor of Assam caught at the back of her throat: the stench wasn’t coming from there.

“You’re supposed to drink it, not inhale it.”

Sophie turned as Perry Fleming came into the shop. Perry Fleming was a tall, elegant woman who could have been any age from forty to sixty. It was clear that she had once been beautiful, and she was still striking. Her eyes were the brightest, clearest green Sophie had ever seen, and for a long time she had wondered if the older woman wore colored contact lenses. Perry’s hair had once been jet-black, but now it was shot through with strands of silver, and she wore it in an intricate

braided ponytail that lay along her back almost to the base of her spine. Her teeth were small and perfect, and her face was traced with tiny laugh lines at the corners of her eyes. She was always much more elegantly dressed than her husband, and today she was wearing a mint green sleeveless summer dress that matched her eyes, in what Sophie thought was probably pure silk.

“I just thought it smelled peculiar,” Sophie said. She sniffed the tea again. “Smells fine now,” she added, “but for a moment there, I thought it smelled like . . . like . . . like rotten eggs.”

She was looking at Perry Fleming as she spoke. She was startled when the woman’s bright green eyes snapped wide open and she whirled around to look across the street . . . just as all the little square windows of the bookshop abruptly developed cracks and two simply exploded into dust. Wisps of green and yellow smoke curled out into the street and the air was filled with the stench of rotten eggs. Sophie caught another smell too, the sharper, cleaner smell of peppermint.

The older woman’s lips moved, and she whispered, “Oh no . . . not now . . . not here.”

“Mrs. Fleming . . . Perry?”

The woman rounded on Sophie. Her eyes were wild and terrified and her usually faultless English now held a hint of a foreign accent. “Stay here; whatever happens, stay here and stay down.”

Sophie was opening her mouth to ask a question when she felt her ears pop. She swallowed hard . . . and then the door to the bookshop crashed open and one of the big men Sophie had seen earlier was flung out onto the street. Now he was missing

his hat and glasses, and Sophie caught a glimpse of his dead-looking skin and his marble black eyes. He crouched in the middle of the street for a moment, then he raised his hand to shield his face from the sunlight.

And Sophie felt something cold and solid settle into the pit of her stomach.

The skin on the man's hand was moving. It was slowly flowing, shifting viscously down into his sleeve: it looked as if his fingers were melting. A glob of what appeared to be gray mud splattered onto the street.

“Golems,” Perry gasped. “My God, he's created Golems.”

“Gollums?” Sophie asked, her mouth thick and dry, her tongue suddenly feeling far too large for her mouth. “Gollum, from Lord of the Rings?”

Perry was moving toward the door. “No: Golems,” she said absently, “Men of Clay.”

The name meant nothing to Sophie, but she watched with a mixture of horror and confusion as the creature—the Golem—on the street crawled out of the sun and under the cover of the awning. Like a huge slug, he left a wet muddy trail behind him, which immediately dried in the fierce sunlight. Sophie caught another glimpse of his face before he staggered into the bookshop. His features had flowed like melted wax and a fine web of cracks covered the skin. It reminded her of the floor of a desert.

Perry dashed out into the street. Sophie watched as the woman pulled her hair free of its intricate braid and shook it loose. But instead of lying flat against her back, her hair flowed out about her, as if it were blown in a gentle breeze. Only there was no breeze.

Sophie hesitated a moment; then, grabbing a broom, she dashed across the road after Perry. Josh was in the bookstore!

The bookshop was in chaos.

The once-neat shelves and carefully stacked tables were scattered and tossed about the room in heaps. Bookcases were shattered, shelves snapped in half, ornate prints and maps lay crushed on the floor. The stench of rot and decay hung about the room: pulped paper and wood turned dry and rotting, even the ceiling was scored and torn, plaster shredded to reveal the wooden joists and dangling electrical wires.

The small gray man stood in the center of the floor. He was fastidiously brushing dust off the sleeve of his coat while two of his Golems explored the cellar. The third Golem, damaged and stiff from exposure to the sun, leaned awkwardly against a crushed bookcase. Flakes of gray mudlike skin were spiraling off what remained of his hands.

The gray man turned as Perry, followed by Sophie, dashed into the bookshop. He gave a neat little bow. "Ah, Madame Perenelle. I was wondering where you were."

"Where is Nicholas?" Perry demanded. She pronounced the name "Nicola." Sophie saw a static charge ripple down the woman's hair, blue and white sparks crackling.

"Downstairs, I believe. My creatures are looking for him."

Clutching the broom tightly in both hands, Sophie slipped past Perry and crept around to the other side of the room. Josh. Where was Josh? She had no idea what was happening and didn't care. She just needed to find her brother.

"You are looking as lovely as ever," the gray man said, eyes fixed on Perry. "You haven't aged a day." He bowed again, an

old-fashioned, courtly movement that he performed effortlessly. “It is always a joy to see you.”

“I wish I could say the same for you, Dee.” Perry moved farther into the room, eyes darting from side to side. “I recognized your foul stench.”

Dee closed his eyes and breathed deeply. “I rather like the smell of brimstone. It is so . . .” He paused. “So dramatic.” Then his gray eyes snapped open and the smile faded. “We’ve come for the Book, Perenelle. And don’t tell me you’ve destroyed it,” he added. “Your continued remarkable good health is proof indeed of its existence.”

Which book? Sophie wondered, glancing around the room; the shop was *full* of books.

“We are the guardians of the Book,” Perry said, and something in her voice made Sophie turn to look at her. The girl stopped, mouth and eyes wide with horror. A silver mist surrounded Perry Fleming, rising off her skin in gossamer threads. Pale and translucent in places, it gathered thick and hard around her hands, making it look as if she were wearing metal gauntlets. “You will never get it,” Perry snapped.

“We will,” Dee said. “We’ve accumulated all the other treasures over the years. Only the Book remains. Now, make it easy on yourself and tell me where it is. . . .”

“Never!”

“I knew you would say that,” Dee said, and then the huge Golem launched himself at Perry. “Humans are so predictable.”

Nick Fleming and Josh were opening the door of the dry cleaner's when they saw Perry, followed by Sophie, race across the street and into the bookshop. "Get this door open," Nick snapped as he reached under his T-shirt. From a simple square cloth bag dangling around his neck, he produced what looked like a small book bound in copper-colored metal.

Josh slammed back the bolts and tugged open the door and Nick raced out, quickly thumbing through the rough-edged pages as he ran, looking for something. Josh caught a brief glimpse of ornate writing and geometric patterns on the thick yellowed pages as he followed Nick back into the bookshop.

Nick and Josh arrived in time to see the Golem touch Perry. And explode.

Fine, gritty powder filled the air, and the heavy black overcoat crumpled to the floor. For a moment, a miniature whirlwind spun there, churning up the dust, then it curled away.

But Nick and Josh's entry diverted Perry's attention. She half turned . . . and in that instant Dee drew his left arm across his eyes and hurled a tiny crystal ball onto the floor.

It was as if the sun had exploded in the room.

The light was incredible. Blinding and harsh, it blanketed the room in its ghastly flare, and with the light came the smell: the stink of burning hair and overcooked food, smoldering leaves and scorched metal mingled with the acrid fumes of diesel.

Josh caught a glimpse of his sister just as Dee tossed the crystal. He was partially shielded by Nick and Perry, both of whom were battered to the floor by the light. Josh's vision became a kaleidoscope of black-and-white still images as the light seared

the rods and cones at the back of his eyes. He saw Nick drop the metal-bound book onto the floor . . . saw two black-clad shapes surround Perry and vaguely heard her scream . . . saw Dee snatch the book with a grunt of triumph while Nick groped blindly on the floor.

“You lose, Nicholas,” Dee hissed, “as you have always lost. Now I get to take those things most precious to you: your beloved Perenelle and your book.”

Josh was moving even before he was aware of it. He launched himself at Dee, catching the small man by surprise. Although only fifteen, Josh was tall for his age, and heavy: he was big enough to be a linebacker, and the youngest on his football team. He knocked Dee to the ground, sending the book spinning out of his grasp. Josh felt the heavy metal cover beneath his fingertips and caught it—just as he was lifted straight off the floor and tossed into a corner. He landed on a pile of books that cushioned his fall. Black spots and darts of rainbow light moved across his eyes every time he blinked.

Dee’s gray shape loomed over Josh, then his gloved hand reached down for the book. “Mine, I think.”

Josh’s grip tightened, but Dee simply wrenched the book from his hand.

“*You. Leave. My. Brother. Alone.*” Sophie Newman brought the broom down five times on Dee’s back, once for every word.

Dee barely glanced at her. Clutching the book in one gloved hand, he caught the broom in the other and muttered a single word, and it immediately withered and turned to ragged pulpy splinters in Sophie’s hands. “You’re lucky I’m in a good humor today,” he whispered, “else I’d do the same to you.” Then Dee and his two remaining Golems swept out of the

devastated bookshop, carrying Perry Fleming between them, and slammed the door closed. There was a long moment of silence, and then the last remaining undisturbed shelf of books clattered to the floor.

CHAPTER FOUR

I suppose calling the police is out of the question.” Sophie Newman leaned against a precariously listing bookcase and wrapped her arms around her body to stop herself from shaking. She was surprised that her voice sounded so calm and reasonable. “We’ve got to tell them that Perry’s been kidnapped. . . .”

“Perry’s not in any danger just yet.” Nick Fleming was sitting on one of the lower rungs of a short stepladder. He was holding his head in his hands and breathing deeply, coughing occasionally as he tried to clear his lungs of dust and grit. “But you’re right, we’re not going to the police.” He managed a wan smile. “I’m not sure what we could say to the police that would make any sense to them.”

“I’m not sure that it makes much sense to us either,” Josh said. He was sitting on the only unbroken chair left in the bookshop. Although he’d broken no bones, he was bruised all

over and knew he was going to turn several really interesting shades of purple over the next couple of days. The last time he'd felt like this was when he'd been run over by three guys on the football field. Actually, this felt worse. At least then, he knew what was happening.

"I think that perhaps gas escaped into the shop," Nick suggested cautiously, "and what we've all experienced and seen is nothing more than a series of hallucinations." He stopped, looking at Sophie and Josh in turn.

The twins lifted their heads to look at him, identical expressions of disbelief on their faces, bright blue eyes still wide with shock. "Lame," Josh said finally.

"Very lame," Sophie agreed.

Nick shrugged. "Actually, I thought it was a pretty good explanation. It covered the smells, the explosion in the shop and any . . . any *peculiar* things you *thought* you might have seen," he finished hurriedly.

Adults, Sophie had decided a long time before, were really bad at making up good excuses. "We didn't imagine those things," she said firmly. "We didn't imagine the Golems."

"The what?" Josh asked.

"The big guys were Golems; they were made out of mud," his sister explained. "Perry told me."

"Ah, she did, did she?" Fleming murmured. He looked around the devastated shop and shook his head. It had taken less than four minutes to completely trash it. "I'm surprised he brought Golems. They are usually so unreliable in warmer countries. But they served his purpose. He got what he came for."

"The book?" Sophie asked. She had caught a glimpse of it

in Josh's hand before the small man pulled it free. Although she was standing in a shop full of books, and their father owned a huge library of antiquarian books, she had never seen anything like that particular one before. It looked as if it was bound in tarnished metal.

Fleming nodded. "He's been looking for that for a long time," he said softly, his pale eyes lost and distant. "A very long time."

Josh rose slowly to his feet, his back and shoulders aching. He held out two crumpled pages to Nick. "Well, he didn't get all of it. When he pulled the book out of my hand, I guess I must have been holding on to these."

Fleming snatched the pages from Josh's hand with an inarticulate cry. Dropping to the floor, he brushed away shredded books and shattered shelving and laid the two pages on the floor side by side. His long-fingered hands were trembling slightly as he smoothed the pages flat. The twins knelt on the floor on either side of him, staring intently at the pages . . . and trying to make sense of what they were seeing. "And we're certainly not imagining *that*," Sophie whispered, tapping the page with her index finger.

The thick pages were about six inches across by nine inches long and were composed of what looked like pressed bark. Tendrils of fibers and leaves were clearly visible in the surface, and both were covered with jagged, angular writing. The first letter at the top left-hand corner of each page was beautifully illuminated in gold and red, while the rest of the words were written in reddish black ink.

And the words were moving.

Sophie and Josh watched as the letters shifted on the page

like tiny beetles, shaping and reshaping themselves, becoming briefly almost legible in recognizable languages like Latin or Old English, but then immediately dissolving and re-forming into ancient-looking symbols not unlike Egyptian hieroglyphs or Celtic Ogham.

Fleming sighed. “No, you’re not imagining that,” he said finally. He reached down the neck of his T-shirt and pulled out a pair of pince-nez on a length of black cord. The pince-nez were old-fashioned glasses without arms, designed to perch on the bridge of the nose. Using the spectacles as magnifying glasses, Nick moved them across the wriggling, shifting words. “*Ha!*”

“Good news?” Josh asked.

“Excellent news. He’s missing the Final Summoning.” He squeezed Josh’s bruised shoulder, making him wince. “If you had wanted to take two pages from the book, rendering it useless, then you could not have chosen better than these.” The broad smile faded from his face. “And when Dee finds out, he’ll be back, and I guarantee you he will not just bring Golems with him next time.”

“Who *was* the gray man?” Sophie asked. “Perry also called him Dee.”

Gathering up the pages, Nick stood. Sophie turned to look at him and realized that he suddenly looked old and tired, incredibly tired. “The gray man was Dr. John Dee, one of the most powerful and dangerous men in the world.”

“I’ve never heard of him,” Josh said.

“To remain unknown in this modern world: that, indeed, is real power. Dee is an alchemist, a magician, a sorcerer and a necromancer, and they are not all the same thing.”

“Magic?” Sophie asked.

“I thought there was no such thing as magic,” Josh said sarcastically, and then immediately felt foolish, after what he’d just seen and experienced.

“Yet you have just fought creatures of magic: the Golems are men created of mud and clay, brought to life by a single word of power. In this century, I’ll wager there are less than half a dozen people who have even seen a Golem, let alone survived an encounter with one.”

“Did Dee bring them to life?” Sophie asked.

“Creating Golems is easy; the spell is as old as humanity. Animating them is a little harder and controlling them is practically impossible.” He sighed. “But not for Dr. John Dee.”

“Who is he?” she pressed.

“Dr. John Dee was Court Magician during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in England.”

Sophie laughed shakily, not entirely sure whether to believe Nick Fleming. “But that was centuries ago; the gray man couldn’t have been older than fifty.”

Nick Fleming crawled around on the floor, pushing through books until he found the one he wanted. *England in the Age of Elizabeth*. He flipped it open: on the page facing an image of Queen Elizabeth I was an old-fashioned etching of a sharp-faced man with a triangular beard. The clothes were different, but there was no doubt that this was the man they had encountered.

Sophie took the book from Nick’s hands. “It says here that Dee was born in 1527,” she said very softly. “That would make him nearly five hundred years old.”

Josh came to stand beside his sister. He stared at the picture, then looked around the room. If he breathed deeply, he could still smell the peculiar odors of . . . magic. That was what he had been smelling—not mint and rotten eggs, but the scent of magic. “Dec knew you,” he said slowly. “He knew you well,” he added.

Fleming moved about the shop, picking up odd items and dropping them to the floor again. “Oh, he knows me,” he said. “He knows Perry, too. He’s known us for a long time . . . a very long time.” He looked over at the twins, his almost colorless eyes now dark and troubled. “You’re involved now, more’s the pity, so the time for lies and subterfuge is past. If you are to survive, you will need to know the truth.”

Josh and Sophie looked at one another. They had both picked up the phrase “If you are to survive . . .”

“My real name is Nicholas Flamel. I was born in France in the year 1330. Perry’s real name is Perenelle: she is ten years older than me. But don’t ever tell her I said that,” he added hastily.

Josh felt his stomach churn and rumble. He was going to say “Impossible!” and laugh and be irritated with Nick for telling them such a stupid story. But he was bruised and aching from being flung across the room by . . . by what? He remembered the Golem that had reached for Perry—*Perenelle*—and how it had dissolved into powder at her touch.

“What . . . what are you?” Sophie asked the question that was forming on her twin’s lips. “What *are* you and Perenelle?”

Nick smiled, but his face was cold and humorless, and for an instant, he almost resembled Dec. “We are legend,” he said simply. “Once—a long time ago—we were simple

people, but then I bought a book, the Book of Abraham the Mage, usually called the Codex. From that moment on, things changed. Perenelle changed. I changed. I became the Alchemist.

“I became the greatest alchemist of all time, sought after by kings and princes, by emperors and even the Pope himself. I discovered the secret of the philosopher’s stone hidden deep in that book of ancient magic: I learned how to turn ordinary metal into gold, how to change common stones into precious jewels. But more than this, much more, I found the recipe for a formulation of herbs and spells that keeps disease and death at bay. Perenelle and I became virtually immortal.” He held up the torn pages in his hand. “This is all that remains of the Codex. Dee and his kind have been seeking the Book of the Mage for centuries. Now they have it. And Perenelle, too,” he added bitterly.

“But you said the Book is useless without these pages,” Josh reminded him quickly.

“That is true. There is enough in the Book to keep Dee busy for centuries, but these pages are vital,” Nick agreed. “Dee will be coming back for them.”

“There’s something else, though, isn’t there?” Sophie asked quickly. “Something more.” She knew he was holding something back; adults always did. Their parents had taken months to tell Josh and her that they would be spending the summer in San Francisco.

Nick glanced at her sharply, and once again she was reminded of the look Dee had given her earlier: there was something cold and inhuman in it. “Yes . . . there is something more,” he said hesitantly. “Without the Book, Perenelle and I

will age. The formulation for immortality must be brewed afresh every month. Within the full cycle of the moon, we will wither and die. And if we die, then the evil we have so long fought against will triumph. The Elder Race will claim this earth again.”

“The Elder Race?” Josh asked, his voice rising and cracking. He swallowed hard, conscious now that his heart was thumping in his chest. What had started out as just another ordinary Thursday afternoon had turned into something strange and terrible. He played a lot of computer games, read some fantasy novels, and in those, *elder* always meant ancient and dangerous. “Elder, as in old?”

“Very old,” Flamel agreed.

“You mean there are more like Dee, like you?” Josh said, then winced as Sophie kicked his shins.

Flamel turned to look at Josh, his colorless eyes now clouded with anger. “There are others like Dee, yes, and others like me, too, but Dee and I are not alike. We were never alike,” Flamel added bitterly. “We chose to follow different paths, and his has led him down some very dark roads. He too is immortal, though even I am not sure how he retains his youth. But we are both human.” He turned to the cash register, which was lying broken open on the floor, and started scooping out the money as he spoke. When he turned to look at the twins, they were startled by the grim expression on his face. “Those whom Dee serves are not and never were from the race of man.” Shoving the money into his pockets, he grabbed a battered leather jacket off the floor. “We’ve got to get out of here.”

“Where will you go? What will you do?” Sophie asked.

“What about us?” Josh finished the thought for her, as she often did for him.

“First I have to get you to a place of safety before Dee realizes that the pages are missing. Then I’ll go in search of Perenelle.”

The twins looked at each other. “Why do you have to get us to a safe place?” Sophie asked.

“We don’t know anything,” Josh said.

“Once Dee discovers that the Book is incomplete, he will return for the missing pages. And I guarantee you, he will leave no witnesses on this earth.”

Josh started to laugh, but the sound died in his throat when he realized that his sister was not even smiling. “You’re . . .” He licked suddenly dry lips. “You’re saying that he would kill us?”

Nicholas Flamel tilted his head to one side, considering. “No,” he said finally, “not kill you.”

Josh heaved a sigh of relief.

“Believe me,” Flamel continued. “Dee can do much worse to you. Much worse.”



CHAPTER FIVE

The twins stood on the sidewalk outside the bookshop, glass from the broken windows crunching under their feet, watching as Nick produced a key. “But we can’t just leave,” Sophie said firmly.

Josh nodded. “We’re not going anywhere.”

Nick Fleming—or Flamel, as they were beginning to think of him—turned the key in the lock of the bookshop and rattled the door. Within the shop, they could hear books sliding onto the floor. “I really loved this shop,” Flamel muttered. “It reminded me of my very first job.” He glanced at Sophie and Josh. “You have no choice. If you want to survive the rest of the day, you have to leave now.” Then he turned away, pulling on his battered leather jacket as he hurried across the road to The Coffee Cup. The twins looked at each other, then hurried after him.

“You’ve got keys to lock up?”

Sophie nodded. She produced the two keys on their Golden Gate Bridge key ring. “Look, if Bernice comes back and finds the shop closed, she’ll probably call the police or something. . . .”

“Good point,” Flamel said. “Leave a note,” he told Sophie, “something short—you had to leave suddenly, some sort of emergency, that sort of thing. Say that I accompanied you. Scribble it; make it look as if you left in a hurry. Are your parents still on that dig in Utah?” The twins’ parents were archaeologists, currently on loan to the University of San Francisco.

Sophie nodded. “For another six weeks at least.”

“We’re still staying with Aunt Agnes in Pacific Heights,” Josh added. “Aunt Agony.”

“We can’t just disappear. She’ll be expecting us home for dinner,” Sophie said. “If we’re even five minutes late, she gets in a tizzy. Last week, when the trolley car broke down and we were an hour late, she’d already phoned our parents by the time we got there.” Aunt Agnes was eighty-four, and although she drove the twins to distraction with her constant fussing, they were very fond of her.

“Then you’ll need to give her an excuse too,” Flamel said bluntly, sweeping into the coffee shop with Sophie close behind him.

Josh hesitated before stepping into the cool, sweet-smelling gloom of The Coffee Cup. He stood on the sidewalk, his backpack slung over his shoulder, looking up and down. If you ignored the sparkling glass littering the sidewalk in front of the bookshop, everything looked perfectly normal, an ordinary weekday afternoon. The street was still and silent, the air was

heavy with just a hint of the ocean. Across the bay, beyond Fisherman's Wharf, a ship's horn sounded, the deep noise lost and lonely in the distance. Everything looked more or less as it had half an hour earlier.

And yet . . .

And yet it was not the same. It could never be the same again. In the last thirty minutes, Josh's carefully ordered world had shifted and altered irrevocably. He was a normal high school sophomore, not too brilliant, but not stupid either. He played football, sang—badly—in his friend's band, had a few girls he was interested in, but no real girlfriend yet. He played the occasional computer game, preferred first-person shooters like Quake and Doom and Unreal Tournament, couldn't handle the driving games and got lost in *Myst*. He loved *The Simpsons* and could quote chunks of episodes by heart, really liked *Shrek*, though he'd never admit it, thought the new Batman was all right and that X-Men was excellent. He even liked the new Superman, despite what other people said. Josh was ordinary.

But ordinary teens did not find themselves in the middle of a battle between two incredibly ancient magicians.

There was no magic in the world. Magic was movie special effects. Magic was stage shows with rabbits and doves and sometimes tigers, and David Copperfield sawing people in half and levitating over the audience. There was no such thing as real magic.

But how then could he explain what had just happened in the bookshop? He had watched shelves turn to rotten wood, seen books dissolve into pulp, smelled the stink of rotten

eggs from Dee's spells and the cleaner scent of mint when Fleming—*Flamel*—worked his magic.

Josh Newman shivered in the bright afternoon sunshine and ducked into The Coffee Cup, pulling open his backpack and reaching in for his battered laptop. He needed to use the café's wireless Internet connection; he had names he wanted to look up: Doctor John Dee, Perenelle and especially Nicholas Flamel.

Sophie scribbled a quick note on the back of a napkin, then chewed the end of the pencil as she read it.

*Mrs. Fleming unwell. Gas leak in the shop. Gone to hospital.
Mr. Fleming with us. Everything else OK. Will phone later.*

When Bernice came back and found the shop closed just before the late-afternoon rush, she was not going to be happy. Sophie guessed that she might even lose her job. Sighing, she signed the note with a flourish that tore through the paper, and stuck it to the cash register.

Nicholas Flamel peered over her shoulder and read it. "That's good, very good, and it explains why the bookshop is closed too." Flamel glanced over his shoulder to where Josh was tapping furiously at his keyboard. "Let's go!"

"Just checking my mail," Josh muttered, powering off the machine and closing it.

"At a time like this?" Sophie asked incredulously.

"Life goes on. E-mail stops for no man." He attempted a smile, and failed.

Sophie grabbed her bag and vintage denim jacket, taking a last look around the coffee shop. She had the sudden thought that she would not be seeing it again for a long time, but that

was ridiculous, of course. She turned out the lights, ushered her brother and Nick Fleming—Flamel—through the door ahead of her and hit the alarm. Then she pulled the door shut, turned the key in the lock and dropped the key chain through the letter box.

“Now what?” she asked.

“Now we get some help and we hide until I figure out what to do with you both.” Flamel smiled. “We’re good at hiding; Perry and I have been doing it for more than half a millennium.”

“What about Perry?” Sophie asked. “Will Dee . . . harm her?” She’d come to know and like the tall, elegant woman over the past few weeks as she came into the coffee shop. She didn’t want anything to happen to her.

Flamel shook his head. “He can’t. She’s too powerful. I never studied the sorcerous arts, but Perry did. Right now all Dee can do is contain her, prevent her from using her powers. But in the next few days she *will* start to age and weaken. Possibly in a week, certainly within two weeks, he would be able to use his powers against her. Still, he’ll be cautious. He will keep her trapped behind Wards and Sigils. . . .” Flamel saw the look of confusion on Sophie’s face. “Magical barriers,” he explained. “He’ll only attack when he is sure of victory. But first he will try to discover the extent of her arcane knowledge. Dee’s search for knowledge was always his greatest strength . . . and his weakness.” He absently patted his pockets, looking for something. “My Perry can take care of herself. Remind me to tell you the story sometime of how she faced down a pair of Greek Lamiae.”

Sophie nodded, though she had no idea what Greek Lamiae were.

As Flamel strode down the street, he found what he was looking for: a pair of small round sunglasses. He put them on, stuck his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket and began to whistle tunelessly, as if he hadn't a care in the world. He glanced back over his shoulder. "Well, come on."

The twins looked at each other blankly, then hurried after him.

"I checked him out online," Josh muttered, looking quickly at his sister.

"So that's what you were doing. I didn't think e-mail could be that important."

"Everything he says checks out: he's there on Wikipedia and there are nearly two hundred thousand results for him on Google. There are over ten million results for John Dee. Even Perenelle is there, and it mentions the book and everything. It even says that when he died, his grave was dug up by people searching for treasure and they found it empty—no body and no treasure. Apparently, his house is still standing in Paris."

"He sure doesn't look like an immortal magician," Sophie murmured.

"I'm not sure I know what a magician looks like," Josh said quietly. "The only magicians I know are Penn and Teller."

"I'm not a magician," Flamel said, without looking at them. "I'm an alchemist, a man of science, though perhaps not the science you would be familiar with."

Sophie hurried to catch up. She reached out to touch his arm and slow him down, but a spark—like static electricity—

snapped into her fingertips. “Aaah!” She jerked her hand back, fingertips tingling. Now what?

“I’m sorry,” Flamel explained. “That’s an aftereffect of the . . . well, what you would call magic. My aura—the electrical field that surrounds my body—is still charged. It’s just reacting when it hits your aura.” He smiled, showing perfectly regular teeth. “It also means you must have a powerful aura.”

“What’s an aura?”

Flamel strode on a couple of steps down the sidewalk without answering, then turned to point to a window. The word TATTOO was picked out in fluorescent lighting. “See there . . . see how there is a glow around the words?”

“I see it.” Sophie nodded, squinting slightly. Each letter was outlined in buzzing yellow light.

“Every human has a similar glow around their body. In the distant past, people could see it clearly and they named it the *aura*. It comes from the Greek word for breath. As humans evolved, most lost the ability to see the aura. Some still can, of course.”

Josh snorted derisively.

Flamel glanced over his shoulder. “It’s true. The aura has even been photographed by a Russian couple called the Kirlians. The electrical field surrounds every living organism.”

“What does it look like?” Sophie asked.

Flamel tapped his finger on the shop window. “Just like that: a glow around the body. Everyone’s aura is unique—different colors, different strengths. Some glow solidly, others pulse. Some appear around the edge of the body, other auras cloak the body like an envelope. You can tell a lot from a person’s aura: whether they are ill or unhappy, angry or frightened, for example.”

“And you can see these auras?” Sophie said.

Flamel shook his head, surprising them. “No, I cannot. Perry can, sometimes. I cannot. But I know how to channel and direct the energy. That’s what you were seeing earlier today: pure auric energy.”

“I think I’d like to learn how to do that,” Sophie said.

Flamel glanced at her quickly. “Be careful what you wish for. Every use of power has a cost.” He held out his hand. Sophie and Josh crowded around on the quiet side street. Flamel’s hand was visibly trembling. And when Sophie looked into his face, she noticed that his eyes were bloodshot. “When you use auric energy, you burn as many calories as if you had run a marathon. Think of it like draining a battery. I doubt I could have lasted very much longer against Dee back there.”

“Is Dee more powerful than you?”

Flamel smiled grimly. “Infinitely.” Shoving his hands back into the pockets of his leather jacket, he continued down the street, Sophie and Josh now walking on either side of him. In the distance, the Golden Gate Bridge began to loom over the rooftops. “Dee has spent the past five centuries developing his powers; I’ve spent that same time hiding mine, concentrating only on those few little things I needed to do to keep Perenelle and myself alive. Dee was always powerful, and I dread to think what he is capable of now.” At the bottom of the hill he paused, looking left and right, then abruptly turned to the left and headed into California Street. “There’ll be time for questions later. Right now, we have to hurry.”

“Have you known Dee long?” Josh persisted, determined to get some answers.

Nicholas Flamel smiled grimly. “John Dee was a mature

man when I accepted him as my apprentice. I still took apprentices in those days, and so many of them went on to make me proud. I had visions of creating the next generation of alchemists, scientists, astronomers, astrologers and mathematicians: these would be the men and women who would create a new world. Dee was probably the finest student I ever had. So I suppose you could say that I've known him for nearly five hundred years—though our encounters have been somewhat sporadic over the past few decades.”

“What turned him into your enemy?” Sophie asked.

“Greed, jealousy . . . and the Codex, the Book of Abraham the Mage,” Flamel answered. “He’s coveted that for a long time, and now he has it.”

“Not all of it,” Josh reminded him.

“No, not all of it.” Flamel smiled. He walked on, with the twins still on either side of him. “When Dee was my apprentice in Paris, he found out about the Codex. One day I caught him attempting to steal it, and I knew then that he had allied himself with the Dark Elders. I refused to share its secrets with him and we had a bitter argument. That night he sent the first assassins after Perry and me. They were human and we dealt with them easily. The next night, the assassins were decidedly less than human. So Perry and I took the Book, gathered up our few belongings and fled Paris. He’s been chasing us ever since.”

They stopped at a cross light. A trio of British tourists was waiting for the light to change and Flamel fell silent, a quick glance at Sophie and Josh warning them to say nothing. The light changed and they crossed, the tourists heading to the right, Nicholas Flamel and the twins moving to the left.

“Where did you go when you left Paris?” Josh asked.

“London,” Flamel said shortly. “Dee nearly caught us there in 1666,” he continued. “He loosed a Fire Elemental after us, a savage, mindless creature that almost devoured the city. History calls it the Great Fire.”

Sophie looked over at Josh. They had both heard of the Great Fire of London; they had learned about it in world history. She was surprised by how calm she felt: here she was, listening to a man who claimed to be more than five hundred years old, recounting historical events as if he had been there when they happened. And she believed him!

“Dee came dangerously close to capturing us in Paris in 1763,” Flamel continued, “and again in 1835, when we were in Rome working as booksellers, as it happens. That was always my favorite occupation,” he added. He fell silent as they approached a group of Japanese tourists listening intently to their guide, who was standing beneath a bright yellow umbrella. When they were out of earshot, he continued, the events of more than a century and a half earlier obviously still fresh and bitter in his memory.

“We fled to Ireland, thinking he would never find us on that island at the edge of Europe. But he pursued us. He had managed to master the control of Wights then, and brought two over with him: the Disease Wight and the Hunger Wight, no doubt intending to set them on our trail. At some point he lost control of the creatures. Hunger and disease ravaged that poor land: a million people died in Ireland’s Great Famine in the 1840s.” Nicholas Flamel’s face hardened into a mask. “I doubt if Dee even paused to think about it. He always had nothing but contempt for humankind.”

Sophie glanced at her brother again. She could tell by the expression on his face that he was concentrating hard, trying to keep up with the deluge of information. She knew he would want to go online and check out some of the details. “But he never caught you,” she said to Flamel.

“Not until today.” He shrugged and smiled sadly. “It was inevitable, I suppose. Throughout the twentieth century, he kept getting closer. He was becoming more powerful, his organization was melding ancient magic and modern technology. Perry and I hid out in Newfoundland for a long time until he loosed Dire Wolves on us, and then we drifted from city to city, starting on the East Coast in New York in 1901 and gradually moving westward. I suppose it was only a matter of time before he caught up with us,” he added. “Cameras, videos, phones and the Internet make it so much harder to remain hidden nowadays.”

“This book . . . this Codex he was looking for . . . ,” Josh began.

“The Book of Abraham the Mage,” Flamel clarified.

“What’s so special about it?”

Nicholas Flamel stopped in the middle of the sidewalk so suddenly that the twins walked right past him. They turned and looked back. The rather ordinary-looking man spread his arms wide, as if he were about to take a bow. “Look at me. Look at me! I am older than America. *That* is what is so special about the book.” Flamel lowered his voice and continued urgently. “But you know something—the secret of life eternal is probably the *least* of the secrets in the Codex.”

Sophie found herself slipping her hand into her brother’s.

He squeezed lightly and she knew, without his saying a word, that he was as frightened as she was.

“With the Codex, Dee can set about changing the world.”

“Changing it?” Sophie’s voice was a raw whisper, and abruptly, the May air felt chilly.

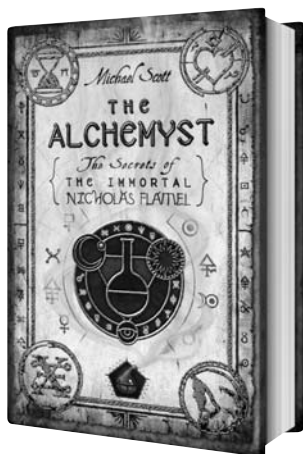
“Changing it how?” Josh demanded.

“Remaking it,” Flamel said softly. “Dee and the Dark Elders he serves will remake this world as it was in the unimaginably ancient past. And the only place for humans in it will be as slaves. Or food.”

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An authority on mythology and folklore, Michael Scott is one of Ireland's most successful authors. He was hailed by the *Irish Times* as "the King of Fantasy in these isles." He lives and writes in Dublin.

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