

THE MAGICIAN

The Secrets of
THE IMMORTAL
NICHOLAS FLATTEL



Michael Scott

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PREVIEW OF THE SORCERESS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALSO BY MICHAEL SCOTT

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For Courtney and Piers
Hoc opus, hic labor est

I am dying.

Perenelle, too, is dying.

The spell that has kept us alive these six hundred years is fading, and now we age a year for every day that passes. I need the Codex, the Book of Abraham the Mage, to re-create the immortality spell; without it, we have less than a month to live.

But much can be achieved in a month.

Dee and his dark masters have my dear Perenelle prisoner, they have finally secured the Book, and they know that Perenelle and I cannot survive for much longer.

But they cannot be resting easy.

They do not have the complete Book yet. We still have the final two pages, and by now they must know that Sophie and Josh Newman are the twins described in that ancient text: twins with auras of silver and gold, a brother and sister with the power to either save the world or destroy it. The girl's powers have been Awakened and her training begun in the elemental magics, though, sadly, the boy's have not.

We are now in Paris, the city of my birth, the city where I first discovered the Codex and began the long quest to translate it. That journey ultimately led me to discover the existence of the Elder Race and revealed the mystery of the philosopher's stone and finally the secret of immortality. I love this city. It holds many secrets and is home to more than one human immortal and ancient Elder. Here, I will find a way to Awaken Josh's powers and continue Sophie's education.

I must.

For their sakes and for the continuance of the human race.

*From the Day Booke of Nicholas Flamel, Alchemyst
Writ this day, Saturday, 2nd June,
in Paris, the city of my youth*

SATURDAY,

2nd June

CHAPTER ONE

The charity auction hadn't started until well after midnight, when the gala dinner had ended. It was almost four in the morning and the auction was only now drawing to a close. A digital display behind the celebrity auctioneer, an actor who had played James Bond on-screen for many years, showed the running total at more than one million euro.

Lot number two hundred and ten: a pair of early-nineteenth-century Japanese Kabuki masks.

A ripple of excitement ran through the crowded room. Inlaid with chips of solid jade, the Kabuki masks were the highlight of the auction and were expected to fetch in excess of half a million euro.

At the back of the room the tall, thin man with the fuzz of close-cropped snow white hair was prepared to pay twice that.

Niccol Machiavelli stood apart from the rest of the crowd, arms lightly folded across his chest, careful not to wrinkle his Savile Row tailored black silk tuxedo. Stone gray eyes swept over the other bidders, analyzing and assessing them. There were really only five others he needed to look out for: two private collectors like himself, a minor European royal, a once-famous American movie actor and a Canadian antiques dealer. The remainder of the audience were tired, had spent their budget or were unwilling to bid on the vaguely disturbing-looking masks.

Machiavelli loved all types of masks. He had been collecting them for a very long time, and he wanted this particular pair to complete his collection of Japanese theater costumes. These masks had last come up for sale in 1898 in Vienna, and he had then been outbid by a Romanov prince. Machiavelli had patiently bided his time; the masks would come back on the market again when the Prince and his descendants died. Machiavelli knew he would still be around to buy them; it was one of the many advantages of being immortal.

Shall we start the bidding at one hundred thousand euro?

Machiavelli looked up, caught the auctioneer's attention and nodded.

The auctioneer had been expecting his bid and nodded in return. I am bid one hundred thousand euro by Monsieur Machiavelli. Always one of this charity's most generous supporters and sponsors.

A smattering of applause ran around the room, and several people turned to look at him and raise their glasses. Niccol acknowledged them with a polite smile.

Do I have one hundred and ten? the auctioneer asked.

One of the private collectors raised his hand slightly.

One-twenty? The auctioneer looked back to Machiavelli, who immediately nodded.

Within the next three minutes, a flurry of bids brought the price up to two hundred and fifty thousand euro. There were only three serious bidders left:

Machiavelli, the American actor and the Canadian.

Machiavelli's thin lips twisted into a rare smile; his patience was about to be rewarded, and finally the masks would be his. Then the smile faded as he felt the cell phone in his back pocket buzz silently. For an instant he was tempted to ignore it; he'd given his staff strict instructions that he was not to be disturbed unless it was absolutely critical. He also knew they were so terrified of him that they would not phone unless it was an emergency. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the ultraslim phone and glanced down.

A picture of a sword pulsed gently on the large LCD screen.

Machiavelli's smile vanished. In that second he knew he was not going to be able to buy the Kabuki masks this century. Turning on his heel, he strode out of the room and pressed the phone to his ear. Behind him, he could hear the auctioneer's hammer hit the lectern. Sold. For two hundred and sixty thousand euro.

I'm here, Machiavelli said, reverting to the Italian of his youth.

The line crackled and an English-accented voice responded in the same language, using a dialect that had not been heard in Europe for more than four hundred years. I need your help.

The man on the other end of the line didn't identify himself, nor did he need to; Machiavelli knew it was the immortal magician and necromancer Dr. John Dee, one of the most powerful and dangerous men in the world.

Niccol Machiavelli strode out of the small hotel into the broad cobbled square of the Place du Tertre and stopped to breathe in the chill night air.

What can I do for you? he asked cautiously. He detested Dee and knew the feeling was mutual, but they both served the Dark Elders, and that meant they had been forced to work together down through the centuries. Machiavelli was also slightly envious that Dee was younger than he and looked it. Machiavelli had been born in Florence in 1469, which made him fifty-eight years older than the English Magician. History recorded that he had *died* in the same year that Dee had been born, 1527.

Flamel is back in Paris.

Machiavelli straightened. When?

Just now. He got there through a leygate. I've no idea where it comes out. He's got Scathach with him.

Machiavelli's lips curled into an ugly grimace. The last time he'd encountered the Warrior, she'd pushed him through a door. It had been closed at the time, and he'd spent weeks picking splinters from his chest and shoulders.

There are two human children with him. Americans, Dee said, his voice echoing and fading on the transatlantic line. Twins, he added.

Say again? Machiavelli asked.

Twins, Dee added, with pure gold and silver auras. You know what that means, he snapped.

Yes, Machiavelli muttered. It meant trouble. Then the tiniest of smiles curled his thin lips. It could also mean opportunity.

Static crackled and then Dee's voice continued. The girl's powers were Awakened by Hekate before the Goddess and her Shadowrealm were destroyed.

Untrained, the girl is no threat, Machiavelli murmured, quickly assessing the situation. He took a breath and added, Except perhaps to herself and those around her.

Flamel took the girl to Ojai. There, the Witch of Endor instructed her in the Magic of Air.

No doubt you tried to stop them? There was a hint of amusement in Machiavelli's voice.

Tried. And failed, Dee admitted bitterly. The girl has some knowledge but is without skill.

What do you want me to do? Machiavelli asked carefully, although he already had a very good idea.

Find Flamel and the twins, Dee demanded. Capture them. Kill Scathach if you can. I'm just leaving Ojai. But it's going to take me fourteen or fifteen hours to get to Paris.

What happened to the leygate? Machiavelli wondered aloud. If a leygate connected Ojai and Paris, then why didn't Dee?

Destroyed by the Witch of Endor, Dee raged, and she nearly killed me, too. I was lucky to escape with a few cuts and scratches, he added, and then ended the call without saying good-bye.

Niccol Machiavelli closed his phone carefully and tapped it against his bottom lip. Somehow he doubted that Dee had been lucky if the Witch of Endor had wanted him dead, then even the legendary Dr. Dee would not have escaped. Machiavelli turned and walked across the square to where his driver was patiently waiting with the car. If Flamel, Scathach and the American twins had come to Paris via a leygate, then there were only a few places in the city where they could have emerged. It should be relatively easy to find and capture them.

And if he could capture them tonight, then he would have plenty of time to work on them before Dee arrived.

Machiavelli smiled; he'd only need a few hours, and in that time they would tell him everything they knew. Half a millennium on this earth had taught him how to be very persuasive indeed.

CHAPTER TWO

Josh Newman reached out and pressed the palm of his right hand against the cold stone wall to steady himself.

What had just happened?

One moment he'd been standing in the Witch of Endor's shop in Ojai, California. His sister, Sophie, Scathach and the man he now knew to be Nicholas Flamel had been *in* the mirror looking out at him. And the next thing he knew, Sophie had stepped out of the glass, taken his hand and pulled him *through* it. He'd squeezed his eyes shut and felt something icy touch his skin and raise the small hairs on the back of his neck. When he'd opened his eyes again, he was standing in what looked like a tiny storage room. Pots of paint, stacked ladders, broken pieces of pottery and bundled paint-spattered cloths were piled around a large, rather ordinary-looking grimy mirror fixed to the stone wall. A single low-wattage lightbulb shed a dim yellow glow over the room. What happened? he asked, his voice cracking. He swallowed hard and tried again. What happened? Where are we?

We're in Paris, Nicholas Flamel said delightedly, rubbing his dusty hands against his black jeans. The city of my birth.

Paris? Josh whispered. He was going to say Impossible, but he was beginning to understand that that word had no meaning anymore. How? he asked aloud. Sophie? He looked to his twin sister, but she had pressed her ear against the room's only door and was listening intently. She waved him away. He turned to Scathach, but the red-haired warrior just shook her head, both hands covering her mouth. She looked as if she was about to throw up. Josh finally turned to the legendary Alchemyst, Nicholas Flamel. How did we get here? he asked.

This planet is crisscrossed with invisible lines of power sometimes called ley lines or cursus, Flamel explained. He crossed his index fingers. Where two or more lines intersect a gateway exists. Gates are incredibly rare now, but in ancient times the Elder Race used them to travel from one side of the world to the other in an instant just as we did. The Witch opened the leygate in Ojai and we ended up here, in Paris. He made it sound so matter-of-fact.

Leygates: I hate them, Scatty mumbled. In the gloomy light, her pale, freckled skin looked green. You ever been seasick? she asked.

Josh shook his head. Never.

Sophie looked up from her spot leaning against the door. Liar! He gets seasick in a swimming pool. She grinned, then pressed the side of her face back against the cool wood.

Seasick, Scatty mumbled. That's exactly what it feels like. Only worse.

Sophie turned her head again to look at the Alchemyst. Do you have any idea where we are in Paris?

Someplace old, I'm guessing, Flamel said, joining her at the door. He put the side of his head back against the door and listened.

Sophie stepped back. I m not so sure, she said hesitantly.

Why not? Josh asked. He glanced around the small untidy room. It certainly looked as though it was part of an old building.

Sophie shook her head. I don t know it just doesn t feel that old. She reached out and touched the wall with the palm of her hand, then immediately jerked it back again.

What s wrong? Josh whispered.

Sophie placed her hand against the wall again. I can hear voices, songs and what sounds like organ music.

Josh shrugged. I can t hear anything. He stopped, abruptly conscious of the huge difference between himself and his twin. Sophie s magical potential had been Awakened by Hekate, and she was now hypersensitive to sights and sounds, smells, touch and taste.

I can. Sophie lifted her hand from the stone wall and the sounds in her head faded.

You re hearing ghost sounds, Flamel explained. They re just noises absorbed by the building, recorded into the very structure itself.

This is a church, Sophie said decisively, then frowned. It s a new church modern, late nineteenth century, early twentieth. But it s built on a much, much older site.

Flamel paused at the wooden door and looked over his shoulder. In the dim overhead light, his features were suddenly sharp and angular, disturbingly skull-like, his eyes completely in shadow. There are many churches in Paris, he said, though there is only one, I believe, which matches that description. He reached for the door handle.

Hang on a second, Josh said quickly. Don t you think there ll be some sort of alarm?

Oh, I doubt it, Nicholas said confidently. Who would put an alarm on a storeroom in a church? he asked, jerking the door open.

Immediately an alarm pealed through the air, the sound echoing and reechoing off the flagstones and walls. Red security lights strobed and flashed.

Scatty sighed and muttered something in an ancient Celtic language. Didn t you tell me once to wait before moving, to look before stepping and to observe everything? she demanded.

Nicholas shook his head and sighed at the stupid mistake. Getting old, I guess, he said in the same language. But there was no time for apologies. Let s go! he shouted over the shrieking alarm, and darted down the corridor. Sophie and Josh followed close behind, while Scatty took up the rear, moving slowly and grumbling with every step.

The door opened onto a short narrow stone corridor that led to another wooden door. Without pausing, Flamel pushed through the second door and immediately a new alarm began to shriek. He turned left into a huge open space that smelled of old incense, floor polish and wax. Banks of lit candles shed a golden yellow light over walls and floor and, combined with the security

lights, revealed a pair of enormous doors with the word EXIT above them. Flamel raced toward it, his footsteps echoing.

Don't touch! Josh began, but Nicholas Flamel grasped the door handles and pulled hard.

A third alarm much louder than the others went off, and a red light above the door began to wink on and off.

Told you not to touch, Josh muttered.

I can't understand it why is it not open? Flamel asked, shouting to be heard above the din. This church is always open. He turned and looked around. Where is everyone? What time is it? he asked, as a thought struck him.

How long does it take to travel from one place to another through the leygate? Sophie asked.

It's instantaneous.

And you're sure we're in Paris, France?

Positive.

Sophie looked at her watch and did a quick calculation. Paris is nine hours ahead of Ojai? she asked.

Flamel nodded, suddenly understanding.

It's about four o'clock in the morning; that's why the church is closed, Sophie said.

The police will be on their way, Scatty said glumly. She reached for her nunchaku. I hate fighting when I'm not feeling well, she muttered.

What do we do now? Josh demanded, panic rising in his voice.

I could try and blast the doors apart with wind, Sophie suggested hesitantly. She wasn't sure she had the energy to raise the wind again so soon. She had used her new magical powers to battle the undead in Ojai, but the effort had completely exhausted her.

I forbid it, Flamel shouted, his face painted in shades of crimson and shadow. He turned and pointed across rows of wooden pews toward an ornate altar picked out in a tracery of white marble. Candlelight hinted at an intricate mosaic in glittering blues and golds in the dome over the altar. This is a national monument; I'll not let you destroy it.

Where are we? the twins asked together, looking around the building. Now that their eyes had adjusted to the gloom, they realized that the building was huge. They could distinguish columns soaring high into the shadows overhead and were able to make out the shapes of small side altars, statues in nooks and countless banks of candles.

This, Flamel announced proudly, is the church of Sacre-Coeur.

Sitting in the back of his limousine, Niccol Machiavelli tapped coordinates into his laptop and watched a high-resolution map of Paris wink into existence on the screen. Paris was an incredibly ancient city. The first settlement went back more than two thousand years, though there had been humans living on the island in the Seine for generations before that. And like many of the earth's oldest cities, it had been sited where groups of ley lines met.

Machiavelli hit a keystroke, which laid down a complicated pattern of ley lines over the map of the city. He was looking for a line that connected with the United States. He finally managed to reduce the number of possibilities to six. With a perfectly manicured fingernail, he traced two lines that directly linked the West Coast of America to Paris. One finished at the great cathedral of Notre Dame, the other in the more modern but equally famous Sacre-Coeur basilica in Montmartre.

But which one?

Suddenly, the Parisian night was broken by a series of howling alarms. Machiavelli hit the control for the electric window and the darkened glass whispered down. Cool night air swirled into the car. In the distance, rising high above the rooftops on the opposite side of the Place du Tertre, was Sacre-Coeur. The imposing domed building was always lit up at night in stark white light. Tonight, however, red alarm lights pulsed around the building

That one. Machiavelli's smile was terrifying. He called up a program on the laptop and waited while the hard drive spun.

Enter password.

His fingers flew over the keyboard as he typed: *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*. No one was going to break that password. It wasn't one of his better-known books.

A rather ordinary-looking text document appeared, written in a combination of Latin, Greek and Italian. Once, magicians had had to keep their spells and incantations in handwritten books called grimoires, but Machiavelli had always used the latest technology. He preferred to keep his spells on his hard drive. Now he just needed a little something to keep Flamel and his friends busy while he gathered his forces.

Josh's head snapped up. I hear police sirens.

There are twelve police cars headed this way, Sophie said, her head tilted to one side, eyes closed as she listened intently.

Twelve? How can you tell?

Sophie looked at her twin. I can distinguish the different locations of the sirens.

You can tell them apart? he asked. He found himself wondering, yet again, at the full extent of his sister's senses.

Each one, she said.

We must not be captured by the police, Flamel interjected sharply. We've neither passports nor alibis. We've got to get out of here!

How? the twins asked simultaneously.

Flamel shook his head. There has to be another entrance, he began, and then stopped, nostrils flaring.

Josh watched uneasily as both Sophie and Scatty suddenly reacted to something he could not smell. What what is it? he demanded, and then he suddenly caught the faintest whiff of something musky and rank. It was the sort of smell he'd come to associate with a zoo.

Trouble, Scathach said grimly, putting away her nunchaku and drawing her swords. Big trouble.

CHAPTER THREE

What? Josh demanded, looking around. The smell was stronger now, stale and bitter, and almost familiar.

Snake, Sophie said, breathing deeply. It's a snake.

Josh felt his stomach lurch. Snake. Why did it have to be snakes? He was terrified of snakes though he'd never admit it to anyone, especially not his sister. Snakes, he began, but his voice sounded high-pitched and strangled. He coughed and tried again. Where? he asked, looking around desperately, imagining them everywhere, sliding out from under the pews, curling down the pillars, dropping down from the light fixtures.

Sophie shook her head and frowned. I don't hear any. I'm just smelling them. Her nostrils flared as she drew a deep breath. No, there's just one.

Oh, you're smelling a snake, all right but one that walks on two legs, Scatty snapped. You're smelling the rank odor of Niccol Machiavelli.

Flamel knelt on the floor in front of the massive main doors and ran his hands over the locks. Wisps of green smoke curled from his fingers.

Machiavelli! he spat. Dee didn't waste any time contacting his allies, I see.

You can tell who it is from the smell? Josh asked, still surprised and a little confused.

Every person has a distinctive magical odor, Scatty explained, standing with her back to the Alchemyst, protecting him. You two smell of vanilla ice cream and oranges, Nicholas smells of mint

And Dee smelled of rotten eggs, Sophie added.

Sulfur, Josh said.

Which was once known as brimstone, Scatty said. Very appropriate for Dr. Dee. Her head was moving from side to side as she paid particular attention to the deep shadows behind the statues. Well, Machiavelli smells of snakes. Appropriate too.

Who is he? Josh asked. He felt as if he should know the name, almost as if he'd heard it before. A friend of Dee's?

Machiavelli is an immortal allied to the Dark Elders, Scatty explained, and no friend to Dee, though they are on the same side. Machiavelli is older than the Magician, infinitely more dangerous and certainly more cunning. I should have killed him when I had the chance, she said bitterly. For the past five hundred years he has been at the heart of European politics, the puppet master working in the shadows. The last I heard, he had been appointed the head of the DGSE, the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure.

Is that like a bank? Josh asked.

Scatty's lips curled in a tiny smile that exposed her overlong vampire incisors. It means the General Board of External Security. It is the French secret service.

The secret service! Oh, that's just great, Josh said sarcastically.

The smell is getting stronger, Sophie said, her Awakened senses acutely aware of the odor. Concentrating hard, she allowed a little of her power to trickle into her aura, which bloomed into a ghostly shadow around her. Crackles of lustrous silver threads sparkled in her blond hair, and her eyes turned to reflective silver coins.

Almost unconsciously, Josh stepped away from his sister. He'd seen her like this before, and she'd scared him.

That means he's close by. He's working some magic, Scatty said. Nicholas?

I just need another minute. Flamel's fingertips glowed emerald green, smoking as they traced a pattern around the lock. A solid click sounded from within, but when the Alchemyst tried the handle, the door didn't move. Maybe more than a minute.

Too late, Josh whispered, raising an arm and pointing. Something's here.

At the opposite end of the great basilica, the banks of candles had gone out. It was as if an unfelt breeze was sweeping down the aisles, snuffing out the flickering circular night-lights and thicker candles as it passed, leaving curls of gray-white smoke hanging on the air. Abruptly, the smell of candle wax grew stronger, much, much stronger, almost obliterating the odor of serpent.

I can't see anything, Josh began.

It's here! Sophie shouted.

The creature that flowed up off the cold flagstones was only marginally human. Standing taller than a man, broad and grotesque, it was a gelatinous white shape with only the vaguest hint of a head set directly onto broad shoulders. There were no visible features. As they watched, two huge arms separated from the trunk of the body with a squelch and grew handlike shapes.

Golem! Sophie shouted in horror. A wax Golem! She flung out her hand and her aura blazed. Ice-cold wind surged from her fingertips to batter the creature, but the white waxy skin simply rippled and flowed beneath the breeze.

Protect Nicholas! Scathach commanded, darting forward, her matched swords flickering out, biting into the creature, but without any effect. The soft wax trapped her swords, and it took all her strength to pull them free. She struck again and chips of wax sprayed into the air. The creature struck at her, and she had to abandon her grip on her swords as she danced backward to avoid the crushing blow. A bulbous fist thundered into the floor at her feet, spattering globules of white wax in every direction.

Josh grabbed one of the folding wooden chairs stacked outside the gift shop at the back of the church. Holding it by two legs, he slammed it into the creature's chest where it stuck fast. As the wax shape turned toward Josh, the chair was wrenched from his hands. He grabbed another chair, darted

around behind the creature and slammed the chair down. It shattered across the creature's shoulders, leaving scores of splinters protruding like bizarre porcupine spines.

Sophie froze. She desperately tried to recall some of the secrets of Air magic that the Witch of Endor had taught her only a few hours ago. The Witch said it was the most powerful of all magics and Sophie had seen what it had done to the undead army of long-deceased humans and beasts Dee had raised in Ojai. But she had no idea what would work against the wax monster before her. She knew how to raise a miniature tornado, but she couldn't risk calling it up in the confined space of the basilica.

Nicholas! Scatty called. With her swords stuck in the creature, the Warrior was using her nunchaku two lengths of wood attached by a short chain to batter at the Golem. They left deep indentations in its skin but otherwise seemed to have no effect. She delivered one particularly fierce blow that embedded the polished wood in the creature's side. Wax flowed around the nunchaku, trapping them. When the creature twisted toward Josh, the weapon was ripped from the Warrior's hands, sending her spinning across the room.

A hand that was only thumb and fused fingers, like a giant mitten, caught Josh's shoulder and squeezed. The pain was incredible and drove the boy to his knees.

Josh! Sophie screamed, the sound echoing in the huge church.

Josh tried to pull the hand away, but the wax was too slippery and his fingers sank into the white goo. Warm wax began to flow off the creature's hand, then curl and wrap around his shoulder and roll down onto his chest, constricting his breathing.

Josh, duck!

Sophie grabbed a wooden chair and swung it through the air. It whistled over her brother's head, the wind ruffling his hair, and she brought it down hard edge-first on the thick wax arm where the elbow should have been. The chair stuck halfway through, but the movement distracted the creature and it abandoned Josh, leaving him bruised and coated in a layer of candle wax. From his place kneeling on the ground, Josh watched in horror as two gelatinous hands reached for his twin's throat.

Terrified, Sophie screamed.

Josh watched as his sister's eyes flickered, the blue replaced with silver, and then her aura blazed incandescent the moment the Golem's paws came close to her skin. Immediately, its waxy hands began to run liquid and spatter to the floor. Sophie stretched out her own hand, fingers splayed, and pressed it against the Golem's chest, where it sank, sizzling and hissing, into the mass of wax.

Josh crouched on the ground, close to Flamel, his hands thrown up to protect his eyes from the brilliant silver light. He saw his sister step closer to the creature, her aura now painfully bright, arms spread wide, an invisible unfelt heat melting the creature, reducing the wax to liquid. Scathach's swords and nunchaku clattered to the stone floor, followed, seconds later, by the remains of the wooden chair.

Sophie's aura flickered and Josh was on his feet and by her side to catch her as she swayed. I feel dizzy, she said thickly as she slumped into his arms.

She was barely conscious, and she felt ice cold, the usually sweet vanilla scent of her aura now sour and bitter.

Scatty swooped in to gather up her weapons from the pile of semiliquid wax that now resembled a half-melted snowman. She fastidiously wiped her blades clean before she slipped them back into the sheaths she wore on her back. Picking curls of white wax off her nunchaku, she slipped them back into their holster on her belt; then she turned to Sophie. You saved us, she said gravely. That s a debt I ll not forget.

Got it, Flamel said suddenly. He stood back, and Sophie, Josh and Scathach watched as curls of green smoke seeped from the lock. The Alchemyst pushed the door and it clicked open, cool night air rushing in, dispelling the cloying odor of melted wax.

We could have done with a little help, you know, Scatty grumbled.

Flamel grinned and wiped his fingers on his jeans, leaving traces of green light on the cloth. I knew you had it well under control, he said, stepping out of the basilica. Scathach and the twins followed.

The sounds of police sirens were louder now, but the area directly in front of the church was empty. Sacr -Coeur was set on a hill, one of the highest points in Paris, and from where they stood, they had a view of the entire city. Nicholas Flamel s face lit up with delight. Home!

What is it with European magicians and Golems? Scatty asked, following him. First Dee and now Machiavelli. Have they no imaginations?

Flamel looked surprised. That wasn t a Golem. Golems need to have a spell on their body to animate them.

Scatty nodded. She knew that, of course. What, then ?

That was a tulpa.

Scatty s bright green eyes widened in surprise. A tulpa! Is Machiavelli that powerful, then?

Obviously.

What s a tulpa? Josh asked Flamel, but it was his sister who answered, and Josh was once again reminded of the huge gulf that had opened up between them the moment her powers had been Awakened.

A creature created and animated entirely by the power of the imagination, Sophie explained casually.

Precisely, Nicholas Flamel said, breathing deeply. Machiavelli knew there would be wax in the church. So he brought it to life.

But surely he knew it would not be able to stop us? Scatty asked.

Nicholas walked out from under the central arch that framed the front of the basilica and stood at the edge of the first of the two hundred and twenty-one steps that led down to the street far below. Oh, he knew it wouldn t stop us, he said patiently. He just wanted to slow us down, to keep us here until he arrived. He pointed.

Far below, the narrow streets of Montmartre had come alive with the sounds and lights of a fleet of French police cars. Dozens of uniformed gendarmes had gathered at the bottom of the steps, with more arriving from the narrow side streets to form a cordon around the building. Surprisingly, none of them had started climbing.

Flamel, Scatty and the twins ignored the police. They were watching the tall thin white-haired man in the elegant tuxedo slowly make his way up the steps toward them. He stopped when he saw them emerge from the basilica, leaned on a low metal railing and raised his right hand in a lazy salute.

Let me guess, Josh said, that must be Niccol Machiavelli.

The most dangerous immortal in Europe, the Alchemyst said grimly. Trust me: this man makes Dee look like an amateur.

CHAPTER FOUR

Welcome back to Paris, Alchemyst.

Sophie and Josh jumped. Machiavelli was still far away to be heard so clearly. Strangely, his voice seemed to be coming from somewhere behind them, and both turned to look, but there were only two stained green metal statues over the three arches in front of the church: a woman on a horse to their right, her raised arm holding a sword, and a man holding a scepter on their left.

I've been waiting for you. The voice seemed to be coming from the statue of the man.

It's a cheap trick, Scatty said dismissively, picking strips of wax off the front of her steel-toed combat boots. It's nothing more than ventriloquism.

Sophie smiled sheepishly. I thought the statue was talking, she admitted, embarrassed.

Josh started to laugh at his sister and then immediately reconsidered. I guess I wouldn't be surprised if it did.

The good Dr. Dee sends his regards. Machiavelli's voice continued to hang in the air around them.

So he survived Ojai, then, Nicholas said conversationally, not raising his voice. Standing tall and straight, he casually put both hands behind his back and glanced sidelong at Scatty. Then the fingers of his right hand started dancing against the palm and fingers of his left.

Scatty drew the twins away from Nicholas and slowly retreated under the shadowed arches. Standing between them, she put her arms around their shoulders both their auras crackling silver and gold with her touch and drew their heads together.

Machiavelli. The master of lies. Scatty's whisper was the merest breath against their ears. He must not hear us.

I cannot say I am pleased to see you, Signor Machiavelli. Or is it Monsieur Machiavelli in this age? the Alchemyst said quietly, leaning against the balustrade, looking down the white steps to where Machiavelli was still small in the distance.

This century, I am French, Machiavelli replied, his voice clearly audible. I love Paris. It is my favorite city in Europe after Florence, of course.

While Nicholas talked to Machiavelli, he kept his hands behind his back, out of sight of the other immortal. His fingers were moving in an intricate series of taps and beats.

Is he working a spell? Sophie breathed, watching his hands.

No, he's talking to me, Scatty said.

How? Josh whispered. Magic? Telepathy?

ASL: American Sign Language.

The twins glanced quickly at one another. American Sign Language? Josh asked. He knows sign language? How?

You seem to keep forgetting that he's lived a long time, Scathach said with a grin that showed her vampire teeth. And he did help create French sign language in the eighteenth century, she added casually.

What's he saying? Sophie asked impatiently. Nowhere in the witch's memory could she find the knowledge necessary to translate the older man's gestures.

Scathach frowned, her lips moving as she spelled out a word.

Sophie *brouillard* fog, she translated. She shook her head. Sophie, he's asking you for fog. That doesn't make sense.

It does to me, Sophie said as a dozen images of fog, clouds and smoke flashed through her brain.

Niccol Machiavelli paused on the steps and drew in a deep breath. My people have the entire area surrounded, he said, moving slowly toward the Alchemyst. He was slightly out of breath and his heart was hammering; he really needed to get back to the gym.

Creating the wax tulpa had exhausted him. He had never made one so big before, and never from the back of a car roaring through Montmartre's narrow and winding streets. It wasn't an elegant solution, but all he had needed to do was to keep Flamel and his companions trapped in the church until he got there, and he had succeeded. Now the church was surrounded, more gendarmes were en route and he had called in all available agents. As the head of the DGSE, his powers were almost limitless, and he'd issued an order to impose a press blackout. He prided himself on having complete control of his emotions, but he had to admit that right now he was feeling quite excited: soon he would have Nicholas Flamel, Scathach and the children in custody. He would have triumphed where Dee had failed.

Later he would have someone in his department leak a story to the press that thieves had been apprehended breaking into the national monument. Close to dawn just in time for the early-morning news a second report would be leaked, revealing how the desperate prisoners had overpowered their guards and escaped on their way to the police station. They would never be seen again.

I have you now, Nicholas Flamel.

Flamel came to stand at the edge of the steps and pushed his hands into the back pockets of his worn black jeans. I believe the last time you made that statement, you were just about to break into my tomb.

Machiavelli stopped in shock. How do you know that?

More than three hundred years ago, in the dead of night, Machiavelli had cracked open Nicholas and Perenelle's tomb, looking for proof that the Alchemyst and his wife were indeed dead and trying to determine whether they had been buried with the Book of Abraham the Mage. The Italian hadn't been entirely surprised to find that both coffins were filled with stones.

Perry and I were right there behind you, standing in the shadows, close enough to touch you when you lifted the top off our tomb. I knew someone would come I just never imagined it would be you. I'll admit I was disappointed, Niccol, he added.

The white-haired man continued up the steps to Sacr -Coeur. You always thought I was a better person than I was, Nicholas.

I believe there is good in everyone, Flamel whispered, even you.

Not me, Alchemyst, not anymore, and not for a very long time. Machiavelli stopped and indicated the police and heavily armed black-clad French special forces gathering at the bottom of the steps. Come now. Surrender. No harm will come to you.

I cannot tell you how many people have said that to me, Nicholas said sadly. And they were always lying, he added.

Machiavelli's voice hardened. You can deal with me or with Dr. Dee. And you know the English Magician never had any patience.

There is one other option, Flamel said with a shrug. His thin lips curled in a smile. I could deal with neither of you. He half turned, but when he looked back at Machiavelli, the expression on the Alchemyst's face made the immortal Italian take a step back in shock. For an instant something ancient and implacable shone through Flamel's pale eyes, which flickered a brilliant emerald green. Now it was Flamel's voice that dropped to a whisper, still clearly audible to Machiavelli. It would be better if you and I were never to meet again.

Machiavelli attempted a laugh, but it came out sounding shaky. That sounds like a threat and believe me, you are in no position to issue threats.

Not a threat, Flamel said, and stepped back from the top steps. A promise.

The cool damp Parisian night air was abruptly touched with the rich odor of vanilla, and Niccol Machiavelli knew then that something was very wrong.

Standing straight, eyes closed, arms at her sides, palms facing outward, Sophie Newman took a deep breath, attempting to calm her thundering heart and allow her mind to wander. When the Witch of Endor had wrapped her like a mummy with bandages of solidified air, she had imparted thousands of years of knowledge into the girl in a matter of heartbeats. Sophie had imagined she'd felt her head swelling as her brain filled with the Witch's memories. Since then, her skull had throbbed with a headache, the base of her neck felt stiff and tight and there was a dull ache behind her eyes. Two days ago she had been an ordinary American teenager, her head filled with normal everyday things: homework and school projects, the latest songs and videos, boys she liked, cell phone numbers and Web addresses, blogs and urls.

Now she knew things that no person should ever know.

Sophie Newman possessed the Witch of Endor's memories; she knew all that the Witch had seen, everything she had done over millennia. It was all a jumble: a mixture of thoughts and wishes, observations, fears and desires, a confusing mess of bizarre sights, terrifying images and incomprehensible

sounds. It was as if a thousand movies had been mixed up and edited together. And scattered throughout the tangle of memories were countless incidences when the Witch had actually used her special power, the Magic of Air. All Sophie had to do was find a time when the Witch had used fog.

But when and where and how to find it?

Ignoring Flamel's voice calling down to Machiavelli, blanking out the sour smell of her brother's fear and the jingle of Scathach's swords, Sophie concentrated her thoughts on mist and fog.

San Francisco was often wrapped in fog, and she'd seen the Golden Gate Bridge rising out of a thick layer of cloud. And only last fall, when the family had been in St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston, they'd stepped out onto Tremont Street to find that a damp fog had completely obscured the Common. Other memories began to intrude: mist in Glasgow; swirling damp fog in Vienna; thick foul-smelling yellow smog in London.

Sophie frowned; *she* had never been to Glasgow, Vienna or London. But the Witch had and these were the Witch of Endor's memories.

Images, thoughts and memories like the strands of fog she was seeing in her head shifted and twisted. And then they suddenly cleared. Sophie clearly remembered standing alongside a figure dressed in the formal clothing of the nineteenth century. She could see him in her mind's eye, a man with a long nose and a high forehead topped with graying curly hair. He was sitting at a high desk, a thick sheaf of cream-colored paper before him, dipping a simple pen into a brimming inkwell. It took her a moment to realize that this was not one of her own memories, nor was it something she had seen on TV or in a movie. She was *remembering* something the Witch of Endor had done and seen. As she turned to look closely at the figure, the Witch's memories flooded her: the man was a famous English writer and was just about to begin work on a new book. The writer glanced up and smiled at her; then his lips moved, but there was no sound. Leaning over his shoulder, she saw him write the words *Fog everywhere. Fog up the river. Fog down the river* in an elegant curling script. Outside the writer's study window, fog, thick and opaque, rolled like smoke against the dirty glass, blotting out the background in an impenetrable blanket.

And beneath the portico of Sacre-Coeur in Paris, the air turned chill and moist, rich with the odor of vanilla ice cream. A trickle of white dribbled from each of Sophie's outstretched fingers. The wispy streams curled down to puddle at her feet. Behind her closed eyes, she watched the writer dip his pen into the inkwell and continue. *Fog creeping fog lying fog drooping fog in the eyes and throats*

Thick white fog spilled from Sophie's fingers and spread across the stones, shifting like heavy smoke, flowing in twisting ropes and gossamer threads. Coiling and shifting, it flowed through Flamel's legs and tumbled down the steps, growing, thickening, darkening.



Niccol watched the fog flow down the steps of Sacre-Coeur like dirty milk, watched it condense and grow as it tumbled, and knew, in that moment, that

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