

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Nicholas and Perenelle Flamel were real people. So was Dr. John Dee. Indeed, all the characters in *The Alchemyst*, with the exception of the twins, are based on real historical characters or mythological beings.

When I originally conceived the idea for *The Alchemyst*, I thought the hero would be Dr. John Dee.

John Dee has always fascinated me. In the Elizabethan Age, the age of the extraordinary, he was exceptional. He was one of the most brilliant men of his time, and all the details about his life in *The Alchemyst* are true: he was an alchemist, a mathematician, a geographer, an astronomer and an astrologer. He did choose the date for Queen Elizabeth I's coronation, and when he was part of her network of spies, he signed his coded messages "007." The two 0's represented the eyes of the Queen, and the symbol that looked like a 7 was Dee's personal mark. There is evidence to suggest that when Shakespeare created the character of Prospero for *The Tempest*, he modeled him on Dee.

The series of books based on an alchemist had been growing in my head and in piles of notebooks for some years, and it seemed perfectly natural that it should be Dee's series. As I wrote other books, I kept coming back to the idea, adding more material, weaving together all the world mythologies and creating the huge and intricate background for the stories. I continued to research the settings, visiting, revisiting and photographing every location I intended to use in the series.

Every story starts with an idea, but it is the characters that move that idea forward. The characters of the twins came to me first. My story was always about a brother and sister, and in mythological terms, twins are very special. Just about every race and mythology has a twin story. As my story progressed, the secondary characters, such as Scathach and the Morrigan, and then later, Hekate and the Witch of Endor, appeared. But somehow I still hadn't quite gotten the hero, the mentor, the teacher for the twins. Dr. John Dee, despite being a wonderful character, was simply not the *right* character.

Then, one day in the late fall of 2000, I was in Paris on business. It is difficult to get lost in Paris, so long as you know where the river Seine is—you can usually see one or more of the great landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, Sacré-Coeur or Notre Dame—but somehow I'd managed to do it. I had left Notre Dame earlier, crossed the Seine on the Pont d'Arcole, heading toward the Centre Pompidou, and somewhere between the Boulevard de Sebastopol and the Rue Beaubourg, I got lost. Not entirely lost; I knew vaguely where I was, but night was beginning to fall. I turned off the Rue Beaubourg into the narrow Rue du Montmorency and found myself looking up at a sign that said AUBERGE NICOLAS FLAMEL: the Nicholas Flamel Hostel. And in front of the building was a sign that said the house, where Flamel and his wife had once lived, dated from 1407, which meant that this had to be one of the oldest houses in Paris.

I went inside and found a charming restaurant, where I had a meal that night. It was a strange experience, eating in the same room where the legendary Nicholas Flamel would

have lived and worked. The exposed beams in the ceiling looked original, which meant they would have been the beams Nicholas Flamel himself would have seen. In the cellar below my feet, Nicholas and Perenelle would have stored their food and wine, and their bedchamber would have been in the small room directly over my head.

I knew quite a bit about the famous Nicholas Flamel. Dee, who had one of the largest libraries in England, had Flamel's books and would have studied his works.

Nicholas Flamel was one of the most famous alchemists of his day. Alchemy is a peculiar combination of chemistry, botany, medicine, astronomy and astrology. It has a long and distinguished history and was studied in ancient Greece and China, and there is an argument that it forms the basis for modern chemistry. As with Dee, all of the details in *The Alchemyst* about Nicholas Flamel are true. We know quite a bit about him because not only do his own writings exist, but also many people wrote about him during his own lifetime.

He was born in 1330 and scraped by on a living as a bookseller and a scrivener, writing letters and copying books for clients. One day he bought a very special book: the Book of Abraham. It, too, really existed, and Nicholas Flamel left us with a very detailed description of the copper-bound book, which was written on what looked like bark.

Accompanied by Perenelle, he spent more than twenty years traveling all over Europe, trying to translate the strange language the book was written in.

No one knows what happened to Nicholas Flamel on that journey. What is authenticated is that when he returned to

Paris in the late fourteenth century, he was extraordinarily wealthy. The rumor quickly went around that he had discovered the two great secrets of alchemy in the Book of Abraham: how to create a philosopher's stone, which changed ordinary metal into gold, and how to achieve immortality. Neither Nicholas nor Perenelle would ever confirm the rumors, and they never explained how they had become so rich.

Although Nicholas and Perenelle continued to live quiet, unassuming lives, they gave a lot of their money to charity, and founded hospitals, churches and orphanages.

The records show that Perenelle died first; not long after, in 1418, the death of Nicholas Flamel was recorded. His house was sold and the buyers tore the place apart looking for some of the Flamels' great wealth. Nothing was ever found.

Later, in the dead of night, the tomb of Nicholas and Perenelle Flamel was broken into . . . and that was when it was discovered that the tomb was empty. Had they been buried in secret graves, or had they never died in the first place? Paris buzzed with rumors, and the legend of the immortal Flamels began almost immediately.

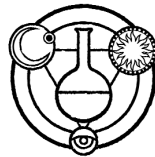
In the years to follow, there were sightings of the Flamels across Europe.

When I came out of the Auberge Nicolas Flamel that evening, I looked back at the ancient house. Six hundred years ago, one of the most famous alchemists in the world lived and worked there—a man dedicated to science, who had made and given away a vast fortune and whose house was

preserved by the grateful people of Paris, who even have streets named after him and his wife (the Rue Nicolas Flamel and the Rue Perenelle in the 4th Arrondissement).

An immortal.

And in that moment, I knew that the twins' mentor was not Dee: Sophie and Josh would be taught by Nicholas and Perenelle. As I stood outside Nicholas and Perenelle's home on that wet fall evening, all the pieces of the book came together, and the Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel took shape.



Front entrance to the Auberge Nicolas Flamel (the Nicholas Flamel Hostel) on Rue du Montmorency, Paris.