



## CHAPTER 2

# The Chamber of Pillars

Jeff and Gennie found themselves standing upon marble steps leading to a huge stone building. The building had the appearance of a Greek Temple, but much, much larger—perhaps ten stories high, rising one hundred feet from its base, with a huge domed roof at its summit. Below the children were several hundred steps leading up to the structure.

As they looked down the long set of stairs, they realized the ancient building was perched on a hilltop overlooking a vast desert. All around them, to the end of every horizon, was an endless ocean of sand. Before them

stretched rolling dune after rolling dune with no signs of life; a barren wasteland.

It was then they noticed the heat. In the brief time they stood on the steps, they began to suffer under the sun's searing intensity. The stifling heat radiated off the stone steps. Their lungs burned with each difficult breath.

"Let's move inside," Mr. Mortimer said. "Too long under this sun and you'll soon look like me."

The kids smiled and the old man laughed aloud. They walked up the few remaining steps to the base of the structure and entered a narrow, darkly lit doorway that led inside to the temple's central chamber. They followed the downward sloping passageway for a few minutes to where the dark cool air inside was a welcome relief from the oppressive heat outside.

The narrow passageway finally opened into a magnificent, cavernous chamber, larger than any room Gennie or Jeff had ever stood in. The circular-shaped hall was at least three hundred feet across from one curved wall to another. The ceiling rose to a dizzying height. The walls had no decorations—no paintings, no statues, no windows. The only adornments were small metal oil lamps every ten feet. Although there were dozens of these lamps, their flickering flames were not bright enough to fully light the huge room so the center of the hall and most of the ceiling were hidden in shadows. The floor was an intricate mosaic of tiny hexagonal tiles, meticulously and individually laid centuries ago. So perfect was the hall's design that the slightest noise, the softest footstep or the quietest whisper, echoed throughout the chamber.

In the center of the vast chamber stood three colossal pillars, monstrous sentinels that rose the full height of the ceiling, and

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“I cannot answer that,” he said. “I cannot foretell the future. But I do know that once you understand the pillars, you will have the knowledge to attain wealth. And you will be able to share that knowledge with your mother and father. Would that not help them?”

There was a long pause as Gennie and Jeff thought about their choices.

“Oh, heck, let’s do it, Gennie!” Jeff blurted out. “We don’t really have anything to lose!”

“Okay, I guess it can only help,” she agreed. Gennie turned to Mr. Mortimer. “We’re in! Let’s go!”

Mr. Mortimer smiled. “I have great confidence in both of you. Your first task will be to uncover the First Pillar. It is the most important pillar of the three. From the First Pillar, all else flows. Good luck.”

Mr. Mortimer gave a peculiar wave of his hand, and a column of fluorescent mist encircled Gennie and Jeff. As it spun upward toward the sky, Gennie and Jeff disappeared.

