Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: The Bronze Key (Magisterium, 3) by Holly Black, Cassandra Clare", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1145. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Holly Black , Cassandra Clare

The Bronze Key (Magisterium, 3)

United States of America (2016)

TAGS: Chalcon Chaos Constantine Hydra Labyrinth Latin (Language) Poseidon Telchines





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Bronze Key (Magisterium, 3)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	Holly Black and Cassandra Clare, *Magisterium: The Bronze Key*. New York: Scholastic, 2016, 249 pp.
ISBN	9780552567701
Official Website	magisteriumtrials.com (accessed: October 22, 2020)
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (middle grade)
Author of the Entry	Sarah F. Layzell, University of Cambridge, sarahlayzellhardstaff@gmail.com
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Creators



Holly Black by AssistantAtHollyBlack. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Holly Black , b. 1971
(Author)

Holly Black (1971) was born in New Jersey, USA, and published her first book in 2002. She is a bestselling author of more than 30 books and has won several awards and honours, including a Newbery Honor for *Doll Bones* in 2014. Black is perhaps best known as the author, with Tony DiTerlizzi, of *The Spiderwick Chronicles* series.

Black lives in Massachusetts, ten minutes away from Cassandra Clare.

Source:

Official website (accessed: October 21, 2020).

Bio prepared by Sarah Hardstaff, University of Cambridge, sflh2@cam.ac.uk



Cassandra Clare by Gage

Cassandra Clare , b. 1973
(Author)

Cassandra Clare (1973) was born in Iran to American parents and spent much of her childhood travelling. Following a career in magazine journalism, Clare became a full-time author in 2006 and is best known as the author of *The Mortal Instruments* series, which has been translated into over 34 languages.

Clare lives in Massachusetts, ten minutes away from Holly Black.

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Source:

Official website (accessed: October 21, 2020).

Bio prepared by Sarah Hardstaff, University of Cambridge, sflh2@cam.ac.uk

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Additional information

Adaptations

Audiobook:

Holly Black and Cassandra Clare, *Magisterium: The Bronze Key*, narrated by Paul Boehmer, New York: Penguin Random House, 2016 [audiobook].

Ebook:

Holly Black and Cassandra Clare, *Magisterium: The Bronze Key*, New York: Scholastic, 2016 [ebook].

Translation

French (France): *La clé de bronze – Magistérium, Tome 3*, Pocket Jeunesse, 2017.

French (Canada): *La clé de bronze*, trans. Marie-Josée Brière, Toronto: Éditions Scholastic, 2017.

Summary

The *Magisterium* series follows Callum (Call) Hunt and his friends Aaron and Tamara through their time at the Magisterium school for mages. The trio learn how to harness the magic of the four elements – earth, water, fire and air – along with the paired magics of chaos and the soul. [Read more in the entry for the *Magisterium* series]

The Bronze Key is the third book in the series and opens with Callum and his father travelling to the Collegium (a college of magic) to receive an honour. The character of Anastasia Tarquin, a member of the magic world's governing Assembly, is introduced. Call receives a note signed by a girl from school, asking him to meet her, it is a trap and he is nearly crushed by a falling chandelier. The event is disrupted further by the discovery of a dead body – fellow student Jen – floating in the water surrounding the Collegium.

Once back at school, the Magisterium, Anastasia arrives. She is apparently trying to find the spy who put Callum and his friends in danger in the previous novel in the series, *The Copper Gauntlet*. Meanwhile, Call and Aaron are taught by a group of rogue mages how to use soul magic to see and touch each other's souls. This ends in

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disaster when Call accidentally turns the murdered Jen into a Chaos-ridden, a person or animal in a state of living death ruled by the element of chaos and at the command of chaos mages. Call's fears of the spy grow when his water supply is sabotaged during a school trial in a maze of fire.

An older student, Alex Strike, tells Aaron and Call that Tamara has been captured by the spy and lures them out into the woods. Too late, Call realises that Alex is the spy. Alex has stolen the Alkahest, a magical glove that can be used to strip mages who work with chaos – like Call and Aaron – of their magic. Alex tries to use the Alkahest on Call. Tamara saves Call and Alex kills Aaron instead, taking his chaos magic and escaping. Call's identity as the resurrected Enemy of Death is uncovered, and he is sent to the Mage prison. At the novel's close, Anastasia visits and reveals that she is the mother of Constantine Madden, the evil 'Enemy of Death' whose reincarnated soul lives in Callum.

Analysis

While all the novels in the series draw on overarching themes and touchstones from antiquity, the second and third books – *The Copper Gauntlet* and *The Bronze Key* – make additional use of specific references. [Read more in the entry for the *Magisterium* series]

The Bronze Key continues the classical theme established in earlier novels. For example, "a giant weird statue of Poseidon" marks the entrance to the underwater Collegium (p. 14). Later Call is attacked by a multi-headed elemental (p.89), reminiscent of a Hydra narrative. ("Elementals" are creatures with tremendous power, who embody one of the elements – air, water, earth or fire.) This elemental is later named as Skelmis (p. 110). The students later encounter an air elemental called Chalcon (p. 137). In Greek mythology, both Skelmis and Chalcon are among the Telchines, punished for their misuse of magic in the same way Black and Clare's elementals are. Finally, the maze of fire that appears in this novel (p. 190) recalls the Labyrinth of Greek mythology.

Along with classical references, this novel and the series as a whole also refer to figures from Renaissance history and culture, such as the alchemist Paracelsus (p. 17). Neo-classical uses of Latin and Greek are also referenced, for example, the "prima materia" of alchemy. Similarly, the mage prison is named the "Panopticon", after

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	philosopher Jeremy Bentham's design of an institution in which prisoners would be under constant surveillance. This combination of classical and neo-classical references positions the series' magical society as Eurocentric. This is reinforced by a plaque Call finds in the Collegium (p. 31), itself built into the Virginia coastline, honouring a mage who died in 1609: 1609 was the year of the Second Virginia Charter, an important colonial document. Readers do not need to have any knowledge of these references to follow the plot or engage with the characters; rather, they contribute to a rich sense of world-building and magical heritage.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Chalcon Chaos Constantine Hydra Labyrinth Latin (Language) Poseidon Telchines
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Adversity Authority Coming of age Communication Conflict Death Disability Disobedience Freedom Friendship Good vs evil Harry Potter Heroism Homesickness Identity Initiation Integrity Life Loss Love Magic powers Maturity Memory Morality Murder Parents (and children) Peers Prediction/prophecy Reincarnation Relationships Romance Sacrifice School Self Soul Students Success and failure Survival Teachers Teenagers Transformation Violence War Water Youth
Further Reading	Leeming, David Adams and Leeming, Margaret Adams, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths*, Oxford University Press, 1994/2009. Owen Christopher, *Systemic Oppression in Contemporary Children's Fantastika Literature*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Anglia Ruskin University, arro.anglia.ac.uk, 2019 (accessed: October 22, 2020).
Addenda	Fan website (accessed: October 22, 2020).

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