

THINK YOU KNOW MAGIC?
THINK AGAIN.

MAGISTERIUM

THE IRON TRIAL



HOLLY
BLACK

CASSANDRA
CLARE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Call has no idea what he'll come up against in The Iron Trial but he knows that if he passes the test, he'll become a student of magic at the Magisterium.

Only, all his life, Call's been warned to stay away from magic, so he tries his best to do his worst - but fails at failing.

Now he must enter the Magisterium, and it's even more sensational and sinister than he could ever have imagined.

Let bestselling authors Holly Black and Cassandra Clare plunge you into the magical unknown . . .

MAGISTERIUM

THE IRON
TRIAL

HOLLY BLACK  CASSANDRA
CLARE

RHCP DIGITAL

FOR SEBASTIAN FOX BLACK,
ABOUT WHOM NO ONE HAS WRITTEN ANY
THREATENING MESSAGES IN ICE.

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PROLOGUE

FROM A DISTANCE, the man struggling up the white face of the glacier might have looked like an ant crawling slowly up the side of a dinner plate. The shantytown of La Rinconada was a collection of scattered specks far below him, the wind increasing as his elevation did, blowing powdery gusts of snow into his face and freezing the damp tendrils of his black hair. Despite his amber goggles, he winced at the brightness of the reflected sunset.

Still, the man was not afraid of falling, although he was using no ropes or belay lines, only crampons and a single ice axe. His name was Alastair Hunt and he was a mage. He shaped and molded the frozen substance of the glacier under his hands as he climbed. Handholds and footholds appeared as he inched his way upward.

By the time he reached the cave, midway up the glacier, he was half frozen and fully exhausted from bending his will to tame the worst of the elements. It sapped his energy to exert his magic so continuously, but he hadn't dared slow down.

The cave itself opened like a mouth in the side of the mountain, impossible to see from above or below. He pulled himself over its edge and took a deep, jagged breath, cursing himself for not getting there sooner, for allowing himself to be tricked. In La Rinconada, the people had seen the explosion and whispered under their breaths about what it meant, the fire inside the ice.

Fire inside the ice. It had to be a distress signal . . . or an attack. The cave was full of mages too old to fight or too young, the injured and the sick, mothers of very young children who could not be left — like Alastair's own wife

and son. They had been hidden away here, in one of the most remote places on the earth.

Master Rufus had insisted that otherwise they would be vulnerable, hostages to fortune, and Alastair had trusted him. Then, when the Enemy of Death hadn't shown up on the field to face the mages' champion, the Makar girl upon whom they'd pinned all their hopes, Alastair had realized his mistake. He'd gotten to La Rinconada as fast as he could, flying most of his way on the back of an air elemental. From there, he'd made his way on foot, since the Enemy's control of elementals was unpredictable and strong. The higher he'd climbed, the more frightened he'd become.

Let them be all right, he thought to himself as he stepped inside the cave. *Please let them be all right.*

There should have been the sound of children wailing. There should have been the low buzz of nervous conversation and the hum of subdued magic. Instead, there was only the howl of the wind as it swept over the desolate peak of the mountain. The cave walls were white ice, pocked with red and brown where blood had splattered and melted in patches. Alastair pulled off his goggles and dropped them on the ground, pushing farther into the passage, drawing on the dregs of his power to steady himself.

The walls of the cave gave off an eerie phosphorescent glow. Away from the entrance, it was the only light he had to see by, which probably explained why he stumbled over the first body and nearly fell to his knees. Alastair jerked away with a yell, then winced as he heard his own shout echo back to him. The fallen mage was burned beyond recognition, but she wore the leather wristband with the large hammered piece of copper that marked her as a second-year Magisterium student. She couldn't have been older than thirteen.

You should be used to death by now, he told himself. They'd been at war with the Enemy for a decade that sometimes felt like a century. At first, it had seemed impossible — one young man, even one of the Makaris, planning to conquer death itself. But as the Enemy increased in power, and his army of the Chaos-ridden grew, the threat had become inescapably dire . . . culminating in this pitiless slaughter of the most helpless, the most innocent.

Alastair got to his feet and pushed deeper into the cave, desperately looking for one face above all. He forced his way past the bodies of elderly Masters from the Magisterium and Collegium, children of friends and acquaintances, and mages who had been wounded in earlier battles. Among them lay the broken bodies of the Chaos-ridden, their swirling eyes darkened forever. Though the mages had been unprepared, they must have put up quite a fight to have slain so many of the Enemy's forces. Horror churning in his gut, his fingers and toes numb, Alastair staggered through it all . . . until he saw her.

Sarah.

He found her lying in the very back, against a cloudy wall of ice. Her eyes were open, staring at nothing. The irises looked murky and her lashes were clotted with ice. Leaning down, he brushed his fingers over her cooling cheek. He drew in his breath sharply, his sob cutting through the air.

But where was their son? Where was Callum?

A dagger was clutched in Sarah's right hand. She had excelled at shaping ore summoned deep from the ground. She'd made the dagger herself in their last year at the Magisterium. It had a name: Semiramis. Alastair knew how Sarah had treasured that blade. *If I have to die, I want to die holding my own weapon*, she'd always told him. But he hadn't wanted her to die at all.

His fingers grazed her cold cheek.

A cry made him whip around. In this cave full of death and silence, a cry.

A child.

He turned, searching frantically for the source of the thready wail. It seemed to be coming from closer to the cave entrance. He plunged back the way he had come, stumbling over bodies, some frozen stiff as statues — until suddenly, another familiar face stared up at him from the carnage.

Declan. Sarah's brother, wounded in the last battle. He appeared to have been choked to death by a particularly cruel use of air magic; his face was blue, his eyes shot with broken blood vessels. One of his arms was outflung, and just underneath it, protected from the icy cave floor by a woven blanket, was Alastair's infant son. As he stared in amazement, the boy opened his mouth and gave another thin, mewling cry.

As if in trance, shaking with relief, Alastair bent and lifted his child. The boy looked up at him with wide gray eyes and opened his mouth to scream again. When the blanket fell aside, Alastair could see why. The baby's left leg hung at a terrible angle, like a snapped tree branch.

Alastair tried to call up earth magic to heal the boy but had only enough power left to take away some of the pain. Heart racing, he rewrapped his son tightly in the blanket and wound his way back through the cave to where Sarah lay. Holding the baby as if she could see him, he knelt down beside her body.

"Sarah," he whispered, tears thick in his throat. "I'll tell him how you died protecting him. I will raise him to remember how brave you were."

Her eyes stared at him, blank and pale. He held the child more closely to his side and reached to take Semiramis from her hand. When he did, he saw that the ice near the blade was strangely marked, as if she had clawed at it while dying. But the marks were too deliberate for that. As

he bent closer, he realized they were words — words his wife had carved into the cave ice with the last of her dying strength.

As he read them, he felt them like three hard blows to the stomach.

KILL THE CHILD



CHAPTER ONE

CALLUM HUNT WAS a legend in his little North Carolina town, but not in a good way. Famous for driving off substitute teachers with sarcastic remarks, he also specialized in annoying principals, hall monitors, and lunch ladies. Guidance counselors, who always started out wanting to help him (the poor boy's mother had died, after all) wound up hoping he'd never darken the doors of their offices again. There was nothing more embarrassing than not being able to come up with a snappy comeback to an angry twelve-year-old.

Call's perpetual scowl, messy black hair, and suspicious gray eyes were well known to his neighbors. He liked to skateboard, although it had taken him a while to get the hang of it; several cars still bore dings from some of his earlier attempts. He was often seen lurking outside the windows of the comic book store, the arcade, and the video game store. Even the mayor knew him. It would have been hard to forget him after he'd snuck past the clerk at the local pet store during the May Day Parade and taken a naked mole rat destined to be fed to a boa constrictor. He'd felt sorry for the blind and wrinkly creature that seemed unable to help itself — and, in the name of fairness, he'd also released all the white mice who would have been next on the snake's dinner menu.

He'd never expected the mice to run amok under the feet of the paraders, but mice aren't very smart. He also hadn't expected the onlookers to run from the mice, but people aren't too smart either, as Call's father had explained after it was all over. It wasn't Call's fault that the parade had been ruined, but everyone — especially the mayor — acted like it was. On top of that, his father had made Call give back the mole rat.

Call's father didn't approve of stealing.

As far as he was concerned, it was almost as bad as magic.



Callum fidgeted in the stiff chair in front of the principal's office, wondering if he'd be back at school tomorrow and if anyone would miss him if he wasn't. Again and again, he went over all the various ways he was supposed to mess up on the mage's test — ideally, as spectacularly as possible. His dad had listed the options for failure again and again: *Make your mind totally blank. Or concentrate on something that's the opposite of what those monsters want. Or focus your mind on someone else's test instead of your own.* Call rubbed his calf, which had been stiff and painful in class that morning; it was that way sometimes. The taller he grew, the more it seemed to hurt. At least the physical part of the mage's test — whatever it was — would be easy to fail.

Just down the hall, he could hear other kids in gym class, their sneakers squeaking on the shining wood of the floor, their voices raised as they shouted taunts to one another. He wished just once that he got to play. He might not have been as fast as other kids or as able to keep his balance, but he was full of restless energy. He was exempt from a gym requirement because of his leg; even in elementary school, when he'd tried to run or jump or climb at recess, one of the monitors would come over and remind him that he needed to slow down before he hurt himself. If he kept at it, they would make him come inside.

As though a couple of bruises were the most awful thing that could happen to someone. As though his leg was going to get worse.

Call sighed and stared out through the glass doors of the school to where his father would be pulling up soon. He

owned the kind of car you couldn't miss, a 1937 Rolls-Royce Phantom, painted bright silver. Nobody else in town had anything like it. Call's father ran an antique store on Main Street called Now and Again; there was nothing he liked more than taking old broken things and making them look shiny and new. To keep the car running, he had to tinker with it almost every weekend. And he was constantly asking Call to wash it and put some kind of weird old car wax on it, to keep it from rusting.

The Rolls-Royce worked perfectly . . . unlike Call. He looked down at his sneakers as he tapped his feet against the floor. When he was wearing jeans like this, you couldn't tell there was anything wrong with his leg, but you could sure tell the minute he stood up and started walking. He'd had surgery after surgery since he was a baby, and all sorts of physical therapy, but nothing had really helped. He still walked with a sliding limp, like he was trying to get his footing on a boat that was rolling from side to side.

When he was younger, he'd sometimes played that he was a pirate, or even just a brave sailor with a peg leg, going down with a sinking ship after a long cannon fight. He'd played pirates and ninjas, cowboys and alien explorers.

But not ever any game that involved magic.

Never that.

He heard the rumble of an engine and began to rise to his feet — only to return to the bench in annoyance. It wasn't his dad, just an ordinary red Toyota. A moment later, Kylie Myles, one of the other students in his grade, hurried past him, a teacher beside her.

"Good luck at your ballet tryouts," Ms. Kemal told her, and started back to her classroom.

"Right, thanks," Kylie said, then looked over at Call oddly, as though she were evaluating him. Kylie *never* looked at Call. That was one of her defining characteristics, along with her shining blond hair and unicorn backpack. When

they were in the halls together, her gaze slid past him like he was invisible.

With an even weirder and more surprising half wave, she headed out to the Toyota. He could see both her parents in the front seats, looking anxious.

She couldn't be going where he was, could she? She couldn't be going to the Iron Trial. But if she was . . .

He pushed himself off the chair. If she was going, someone should warn her.

Lots of kids think it's about being special, Call's father had said, the disgust in his voice evident. Their parents do, too. Especially in families where magical ability dates back generations. And some families where the magic has mostly died out see a magical child as hope for a return to power. But it's the children with no magical relatives you should pity most. They're the ones who think it's going to be like it is in the movies.

It's nothing like the movies.

At that moment, Call's dad pulled up to the school curb with a squeal of brakes, effectively cutting off Call's view of Kylie. Call limped toward the doors and outside, but by the time he made it to the Rolls, the Myles's Toyota was swerving around the corner and out of sight.

So much for warning her.

"Call." His father had gotten out of the car and was leaning against the passenger-side door. His mop of black hair — the same tangly black hair Call had — was going gray at the sides, and he wore a tweed jacket with leather elbow patches, despite the heat. Call often thought that his father looked like Sherlock Holmes in the old BBC show; sometimes people seemed surprised he didn't speak with a British accent. "Are you ready?"

Call shrugged. How could you be ready for something that had the potential to mess up your whole life if you got it wrong? Or right, in this case. "I guess so."

His father pulled the door open. "Good. Get in."

The inside of the Rolls was as spotless as the outside. Call was surprised to find his old pair of crutches thrown into the backseat. He hadn't needed them in years, not since he'd fallen off a jungle gym and twisted his ankle — the ankle on his *good* leg. As Call's father slid into the car and started the engine, Call pointed to them and asked, "What's with those?"

"The worse off you look, the likelier they are to reject you," his father said grimly, glancing behind him as they pulled out of the parking lot.

"That seems like cheating," Call objected.

"Call, people cheat to *win*. You can't cheat to lose."

Call rolled his eyes, letting his dad believe what he wanted. All Call knew for sure was that there was no way he was going to use those crutches if he didn't have to. He didn't want to argue about it, though, not today, when Call's father had already uncharacteristically burned the toast at breakfast and snapped at Call when he complained about having to go to school just to be removed a couple hours later.

Now his father crouched over the wheel, jaw set and the fingers of his right hand wrapped tightly around the gearshift, changing gears with ineffectual violence.

Call tried to focus his gaze on the trees outside, their leaves just starting to yellow, and to remember everything he knew about the Magisterium. The first time his father had said anything about the Masters and how they chose their apprentices, he'd sat Call down in one of the big leather chairs in his study. Call's elbow had been bandaged and his lip was split from a fight at school, and he'd been in no mood for listening. Besides, his father had looked so serious that Call had gotten scared. And that's the way his father spoke, too, as though he was going to tell Call he had a terrible disease. It turned out the sickness was a potential for magic.

Call had scrunched up in the chair while his father talked. He was used to getting picked on; other kids thought his leg made him an easy target. Usually, he was able to convince them he wasn't. That time, however, there had been a bunch of older boys who'd cornered him behind the shed near the jungle gym on his way home from school. They'd pushed him around and come at him with the usual insults. Callum had learned most people backed down when he put up a fight, so he'd tried to hit the tallest boy. That had been his first mistake. Pretty soon, they had him on the ground, one of them sitting on his knees while another punched him in the face, trying to get him to apologize and admit to being a gimpy clown.

"Sorry for being awesome, losers," Call had said, right before he blacked out.

He must have only been out for a minute, because when he opened his eyes, he could just see the retreating figures of the boys in the distance. They were running away. Call couldn't believe his rejoinder had worked so well.

"That's right," he'd said, sitting up. "You better run!"

Then he'd looked around and seen that the concrete of the playground had cracked open. A long fissure ran from the swings all the way to the shed wall, splitting the small building in half.

He was lying directly in the path of what looked like a mini earthquake.

He'd thought it was the most awesome thing that had ever happened. His father disagreed.

"Magic runs in families," Call's father said. "Not everyone in a family will necessarily have it, but it looks like you might. Unfortunately. I am so sorry, Call."

"So the split in the ground — you're saying I did that?" Call had felt torn between giddy glee and extreme horror, but the glee was winning out. He could feel the corners of his mouth turn up and tried to force them back down. "Is that what mages do?"

“Mages draw on the elements — earth, air, water, fire, and even the void, which is the source of the most powerful and terrible magic of all, chaos magic. They can use magic for many things, including ripping apart the very earth, as you did.” His father had nodded to himself. “In the beginning, when magic first comes on, it is very intense. Raw power . . . but balance is what tempers magical ability. It takes a lot of study to have as much power as a newly woken mage. Young mages have little control. But, Call, you must fight it. And you must never use your magic again. If you do, the mages will take you away to their tunnels.”

“That’s where the school is? The Magisterium is underground?” Call had asked.

“Buried under the earth where no one can find it,” his father told him grimly. “There’s no light down there. No windows. The place is a maze. You could get lost in the caverns and die and no one would ever know.”

Call licked his suddenly dry lips. “But you’re a magician, aren’t you?”

“I haven’t used my magic since your mother died. I’ll never use it again.”

“And Mom went there? To the tunnels? Really?” Call was eager to hear anything about his mother. He didn’t have much. Some yellowed photographs in an old scrapbook, showing a pretty woman with Call’s ink-black hair and eyes a color Call couldn’t make out. He knew better than to ask his father too many questions about her. He never talked about Call’s mom unless he absolutely had to.

“Yes, she did,” Call’s father told him. “And it’s because of magic that she died. When mages go to war, which is often, they don’t care about the people who die because of it. Which is the other reason you must not attract their attention.”

That night, Call woke up screaming, believing he was trapped underground, earth piling on him as if he were

being buried alive. No matter how much he thrashed around, he couldn't breathe. After that, he dreamed that he was running away from a monster made of smoke whose eyes swirled with a thousand different evil colors . . . only he couldn't run fast enough because of his leg. In the dreams, it dragged behind him like a dead thing until he collapsed, with the monster's hot breath on his neck.

Other kids in Call's class were afraid of the dark, the monster under the bed, zombies, or murderers with giant axes. Call was afraid of magicians, and he was even more afraid he was one.

Now he was going to meet them. The same magicians who were the reason his mother was dead and his father hardly ever laughed and didn't have any friends, sitting instead in the workroom he'd made out of the garage and fixing beat-up furniture and cars and jewelry. Call didn't think it took a genius to figure out why his dad was obsessed with putting broken things back together.

They whizzed past a sign welcoming them to Virginia. Everything looked the same. He didn't know what he'd expected, but he'd seldom been out of North Carolina before. Their trips beyond Asheville were infrequent, mostly to go to car-part swap meets and antique fairs, where Call would wander around among mounds of unpolished silverware, collections of baseball cards in plastic sleeves, and weird old taxidermied yak heads, while his dad bargained for something boring.

It occurred to Call that if he didn't mess up this test, he might never go to one of those swap meets again. His stomach lurched and a cold shiver rattled his bones. He forced himself to think about the plan his father had drilled into him: *Make your mind totally blank. Or focus on something that's the opposite of what those monsters want. Or focus your mind on someone else's test instead of your own.*

He let out his breath. His father's nerves were getting to him. It was going to be fine. It was easy to mess up tests.

The car swung off the highway onto a narrow road. The only sign had the symbol of an airplane on it, with the words AIRFIELD CLOSED FOR RENOVATION beneath it.

"Where are we going?" Call asked. "Are we *flying* somewhere?"

"Let's hope not," his dad muttered. The street had turned abruptly from asphalt to dirt. As they bumped over the next few hundred yards, Call grabbed on to the door frame to keep himself from flying up and whacking his head on the roof. Rolls-Royces were not made for dirt roads.

Suddenly, the lane widened and the trees parted. The Rolls was now in a huge cleared space. In the middle was an enormous hangar made out of corrugated steel. Parked around it were about a hundred cars, from beat-up pickup trucks to sedans almost as fancy as the Phantom and a lot newer. Call saw parents and their kids, all about his age, hurrying toward the hangar.

"I think we're late," Call said.

"Good." His father sounded grimly pleased. He pulled the car to a stop and got out, gesturing for Call to follow. Call was glad to see that his father seemed to have forgotten about the crutches. It was a hot day, and the sun beat down on the back of Call's gray T-shirt. He wiped his sweaty palms against his jeans as they walked across the lot and into the big black open space that was the hangar entrance.

Inside, everything was crazy. Kids milled around, their voices carrying in the vast space. Bleachers were set up along one metal wall; even though they could hold many more people than were present, they were dwarfed by the immensity of the room. Bright blue tape marked x's and circles along the concrete floor.

Across the other side, in front of a set of hangar doors that would once have opened to let airplanes taxi out onto

runways, were the mages.



CHAPTER TWO

THERE WERE ONLY about a half dozen mages, but they seemed to fill the space with their presence. Call wasn't sure what he'd thought they were going to look like — he knew his father was a mage and he seemed pretty ordinary, if tweedy. He figured most of the other magicians would look much weirder. Maybe pointy hats. Or robes with silver stars on them. He'd hoped that someone would be green-skinned.

To his disappointment, they looked completely normal. There were three women and three men, each wearing loose-fitting, long-sleeved belted black tunics over pants of the same material. There were leather-and-metal cuffs around their wrists, but Call couldn't tell if there was anything special about those or if they were just a fashion statement.

The tallest of the mages, a big, wide-shouldered man with a hawkish nose and shaggy brown hair shot through with threads of silver, stepped forward and addressed the families in the bleachers.

"Welcome, aspirants, and welcome, families of aspirants, to the most significant afternoon of your child's life."

Right, Call thought. *No pressure or anything.*

"Do they all know they're here to try to get into magic school?" he asked quietly.

His father shook his head. "The parents believe whatever they want to believe and hear whatever they want to hear. If they want their child to be a famous athlete, they believe he is getting into an exclusive training program. If they hope she'll be a brain surgeon, this is pre-pre-premed. If they want him to grow up to be wealthy, then they believe this is the sort of prep school where he'll hobnob with the rich and powerful."

The mage went on, explaining how the afternoon was going to go, how long it would take. "Some of you have traveled a great distance to give your child this opportunity, and we want to extend our gratitude —"

Call could hear him, but he heard another voice, too, one that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once.

When Master North finishes speaking, all aspirants should rise and come to the front. The Trial is about to begin.

"Did you hear that?" Call asked his dad, who nodded. Call looked around at the faces all turned to the mages, some apprehensive, some smiling. "What about the kids?"

The mage — Call guessed he must be Master North, according to the disembodied voice — was finishing up his speech. Call knew he should start down the bleachers, since it was going to take him longer than it would take the others. But he wanted to find out the answer.

"Anyone with even a little power can hear Master Phineus — and most of the aspirants will have had some kind of magical occurrence before. Some have already guessed what they are, some already know for sure, and the rest are about to find out."

There was a shuffling as kids got to their feet, making the metal stands shake.

"So that's the first test?" Call asked his father. "Whether we hear Master Phineus?"

His dad barely seemed to register what he was saying. He looked distracted. "I suppose. But the other tests will be much worse. Just remember what I said and it will all be over soon." He caught Call's wrist, startling him — he knew his dad cared about him, but he wasn't touchy-feely most of the time. He gripped Call's hand hard and released it fast. "Now go."

As Call made his way down the bleachers, the other kids were being corralled into groups. One of the female

magicians waved Call toward a group at the end. All the other aspirants were whispering to one another, seeming nervous but full of anticipation. Call saw Kylie Myles two groups over. He wondered if he should yell over to her that she wasn't really here for ballet school tryouts, but she was grinning and chatting with some of the other aspirants, so he doubted she would have listened to him anyway.

Ballet school tryouts, he thought grimly. *That's how they get you.*

"I am Master Milagros," the female mage who'd directed Call was now saying as she herded her group expertly out of the big room and down a long, blandly painted hallway. "For this first test, you will all be together. Please follow behind me in an orderly fashion."

Call, almost at the back, hurried a little bit to catch up. He knew that being late was probably an advantage if he wanted them to think that he didn't care about the tests or didn't know what he was doing, but he hated the stares he got when he lagged behind. In fact, he hurried ahead so quickly that he accidentally banged into the shoulder of a pretty girl with large, dark eyes. She shot him an annoyed look from underneath the even darker curtain of her hair.

"Sorry," Call said automatically.

"We're all nervous," the girl said, which was funny, because she didn't look nervous. She looked completely composed. Her eyebrows were perfectly arched. There wasn't a speck of dust on her caramel-colored sweater or her expensive-looking jeans. She wore a delicate filigree hand pendant around her throat that Call recognized from antique store visits as a Hand of Fatima. The gold earrings in her ears looked like they had once belonged to a princess, if not a queen. Call immediately felt self-conscious, as if he were covered in dirt.

"Hey, Tamara!" a tall Asian boy with floppy razor-cut black hair said, and the girl turned away from Call. The boy said something else that Call couldn't hear, sneering as he

said it, and Call worried it was about how Call was a cripple who couldn't help lurching into people. Like he was Frankenstein's monster. Resentment bubbled in his brain — especially since Tamara hadn't looked at him like she'd noticed his leg at all. She'd been annoyed with him, like he was a regular kid. He reminded himself that as soon as he failed the exams, he'd never have to see any of these people again.

Also, they were going to die underground.

That thought kept him going down an endless series of halls and into a big white room where rows of desks were laid out in lines. It looked like every other room Call had ever taken a standardized test in. The desks were plain and wooden, attached to rickety chairs. Each desk had a blue book labeled with a kid's name and a pen laid on top. There was a hubbub as everyone went from desk to desk, searching for his or her place card. Call found his in the third row and slid into the seat, behind a kid with pale wavy hair and a soccer team jacket. He looked more like a jock than a candidate for mage school. The boy smiled at Call as though he was genuinely happy to be seated near him.

Call didn't bother smiling back. He opened his blue book, glancing at the pages with questions and empty circles for *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, or *E*. He had been expecting the tests to be scary, but the only apparent danger was the danger of being bored to death.

"Please keep your books closed until the test has started," Master Milagros said from the front of the room. She was a tall, extremely young-looking Master who reminded Call a little of his homeroom teacher. She had the same sense of awkward nervousness, as if she wasn't used to spending a lot of time around kids. Her hair was black and short, with a streak of pink in it.

Call closed his book and then looked around, realizing he'd been the only person to open it. He decided he wasn't

going to tell his father how easy it had been to avoid fitting in.

“First of all, I want to welcome you all to the Iron Trial,” Master Milagros went on, clearing her throat. “Now that we’re away from your guardians, we can explain in more detail what is going to happen today. Some of you will have received invitations to apply for music school, or a school that concentrates on astronomy or advanced mathematics or horseback riding. But as you may have supposed by now, you are actually here to be evaluated for acceptance into the Magisterium.”

She raised her arms, and the walls seemed to fall away. In their place was rough-hewn stone. The kids remained at their desks, but the ground beneath them had changed to mica-flecked rock, which sparkled like strewn glitter. Shimmering stalactites hung from the ceiling like icicles.

The blond boy drew in his breath. All across the room, Call could hear low exclamations of awe.

It was as if they were inside the caves of the Magisterium.

“So cool,” said a pretty girl with white beads on the ends of her cornrowed braids.

In that moment, despite everything his father had told Call, he wanted to go to the Magisterium. It no longer seemed dark or scary, but amazing. Like being an explorer or going to another planet. He thought of his father’s words:

The magicians will tempt you with pretty illusions and elaborate lies. Don’t be drawn in.

Master Milagros went on, her voice gaining in confidence. “Some of you are legacy students, with parents or other family members who have attended the Magisterium. Others have been chosen because we believe you have the potential to become mages. But none of you are assured a place. Only the Masters know what makes a perfect candidate.”

Call stuck his hand up and, without waiting to be called on, asked, "What if you don't want to go?"

"Why wouldn't anyone want to go to pony school?" wondered a boy with a mop of brown hair, seated diagonally from Call. He was small and pale, with scrawny long legs and arms sticking out of a blue T-shirt with the faded picture of a horse on it.

Master Milagros looked as if she was so annoyed, she'd forgotten to be nervous. "Drew Wallace," she said. "This is not pony school. You are being tested to see if you possess the qualities that will lead you to be chosen as an apprentice, and to accompany your teacher, called your Master, to the Magisterium. And if you possess sufficient magic, *attendance is not optional*." She glared at Call. "The Trial is for your own safety. Those of you who are legacies know the dangers untrained mages pose to themselves and others."

A murmur ran around the room. Several of the kids, Call realized, were looking at Tamara. She was sitting very straight in her chair, her eyes fixed ahead of her, her chin jutting out. He knew that look. It was the same look he got when people muttered about his leg or his dead mother, or his weirdo father. It was the look of someone trying to pretend she didn't know she was being talked about.

"So what happens if you don't get into the Magisterium?" asked the girl with the braids.

"Good question, Gwenda Mason," said Master Milagros encouragingly. "To be a successful mage, you must possess three things. One is the intrinsic power of magic. That, you all have, to some degree. The second is the knowledge of how to use it. That, we can give you. The third is control — and that, that must come from inside of you. Now, in your first year, as untaught mages, you are reaching the apex of your power, but you have no learning and no control. If you seem to possess neither an aptitude for learning nor one for control, then you will not find a place at the

Magisterium. In that case, we will make sure that you — and your families — are permanently safe from magic or any danger of succumbing to the elements.”

Succumbing to the elements? What does that mean? Call wondered. It sounded like other people were just as confused: “Does that mean I failed a test?” someone asked. “Wait, what does she mean?” another kid said.

“So this definitely isn’t pony school?” Drew asked again, wistfully.

Master Milagros ignored all this. The images of the cavern slowly faded away. They were in the same white room they’d always been in.

“The pens in front of you are special,” she said, looking as if she’d remembered to be nervous again. Call wondered how old she was. She seemed young, even younger because of the pink hair, but he guessed you had to be a pretty accomplished magician to be a Master. “If you don’t use your pen, we won’t be able to read your test. Shake it to activate the ink. And remember to show your work. You may begin.”

Call opened the book again. He squinted at the first question:

1. A dragon and a wyvern set out at 2 P.M. from the same cavern, headed in the same direction. The average speed of the dragon is 30 mph slower than twice the speed of the wyvern. In 2 hours, the dragon is 20 miles ahead of the wyvern. Find the flight speed of the dragon, factoring in that the wyvern is bent on revenge.

Revenge? Call goggled at the page, then flipped it. The next one was no better.

2. Lucretia is preparing to plant a crop of deadly nightshade this autumn. She will plant 4 patches of