

THE **Chronicles of Xan**  
BOOK ONE

Shadow  
in the  
**Dark**

ANTONY BARONE

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"A brisk-moving and suspenseful tale that majestically presents the power of truth and mercy in a world driven by death and mayhem. Exquisitely balanced, *Shadow in the Dark* has both the simplicity to appeal to a young reader and the richness to touch an adult audience. Barone has penned a masterpiece."

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# THE Chronicles of Xan

ANTONY BARONE

## Shadow in the Dark

BOOK ONE

## The Haunted Cathedral

BOOK TWO

## The Fire of Eden

BOOK THREE

## Prologue

**T**he shadow glided over the cold dew of midnight, a silhouette in the dark. Its hands—invisible in the dimness—clung to a shiny object. Advancing along a path, it walked with purpose under the tall trees.

The ghostly form passed through the final row of thin trunks and onto the grassy field. The moon cast an eerie glow on its black robe. Towering in the distance stood a row of stone buildings. The shadow moved towards them, quiet and ominous.

As it neared, a hushed gasp could be heard from a narrow window on high. Eyes—small and afraid—peered down from the opening at the moving shape below.

A frightened voice cried, "What is it?"

# I

## Tragedy

The galloping horses rolled as thunder before a terrible storm. Dirt swirled wildly from the road at the strike of each hoof. Like a menacing cloud, they drew closer to the sleeping village ahead.

The bandits set their minds to the evil task at hand. Their leader—clothed in black—wore a shirt of chain-mail armor over his garments. It would be easy, he assured himself. He expected little resistance from the villagers. He'd done such work before and would not mind doing it again. His conscience had been dulled by years of neglect. And later he would drown any remaining pangs of regret with ale as he counted his reward.

"Onward!" he commanded his men loudly.

The dozen gritty bandits rode on, clad for battle. Some of them wore notched daggers in their belts, but most carried maces: large wooden clubs crowned with metal studs. Four carried crossbows they could fit with sharp quarrels. But only their leader wielded an iron sword, a very expensive weapon.

The rising sun cast a red glow on their faces as the village neared.

They would soon arrive.



The boy raced along the woodland trail, panic-stricken. He panted as his cramping muscles pleaded for him to stop. But he had no time to rest. He must return to his village immediately. He'd heard foul cries carried on the wings of the wind—an evil

omen.

The smell of burning filled his nostrils; his village was on fire! The chill morning air—poisoned with smoke—stung the boy's hazel eyes and rustled his dark hair as he ran.

*I should never have left!*

He recalled how he'd arisen from his uncomfortable straw mattress before dawn to explore the mysterious woodland trail. His father had approved his plan the night before. "As the sun finds the dawn, son, you too will discover what you seek," the kind man had said, refusing to reveal the trail's secret. But now his foolish adventure had gone terribly wrong.

*Father will know what to do.*

The cursed woodland trail! The boy had followed it for a distance once before, when it had led him into the heart of the forest. This morning he'd sought to travel to its very end.

A new sound touched his ears—was it laughter? If so, it was an evil sort. He doubled his efforts despite the pain in his side. He must reach the village before it was too late.

He finally reached the point where the trail began its last leg back to the village. Here, the mist of smoke grew even stronger, and he could distinctly hear the terrified shouts of women and children. Tragedy had struck.

*I'm too late!!*

He sprinted faster, dreading what lay ahead. His heart beat mercilessly as fear built within him. On his chapped lips he breathed the only prayer he could think to say: "Help, Lord!"

The tree's root should not have been a surprise to the boy. He'd avoided it many times before. On occasion he would jump on the root, supposing it to be a fiery dragon's tail. Other days he would leap over it as though it were a large serpent waiting to strike his heel. But that morning, in his panic and the dimness of the stinging smoke, the boy's eyes missed it.

A pained cry left his lips as his foot hit the root. He shot forward at full speed, out of control. The tree approached him in a blur and his head struck it with total force.

He remembered no more.



He lay motionlessly on a covering of scattered leaves. The crooked tree seemed to tower over him in victory. Hours had passed since the accident.

Neither the thickening smoke nor the heart-wrenching cries of sorrow had stirred the boy. Momentarily, a black squirrel stopped to observe him, but soon lost interest.

The village was strangely silent now, like the boy who remained so still under the tree.

Then, as if beckoned, a lone figure appeared on the trail.

The mysterious shape, garbed in a black robe, approached the limp body. It came from deep in the woodland, past the point where the trail curved. Seeing the boy, the black robe bowed and gently touched his wounded head.

The injury was serious and needed immediate attention.

Carrying the hurt youth, the robed figure disappeared into the forest.

## II

# Memory

The boy slept. He dreamed he was a great knight on a noble quest. Glistening in the sunlight, his chain-mail shirt and sword shone brightly. On foot he hunted an immense beast. But something went wrong during the chase. The beast suddenly turned on him ferociously. The boy became the hunted.

Just then a figure approached from over a field. The boy froze as the beast scurried away into the forest at the sight—it was Death, the Grim Reaper! It came for him wearing a flowing black robe and holding a sharp scythe blade in its skeletal hands. As it reached out for his face, terror filled the boy's heart.

"I'm not ready to die," he whimpered.

He fled into the woodland. Yet on the path ahead Death awaited him. When he ran in a different direction, Death blocked his exit again. He couldn't escape.

"Help!" he called out repeatedly in his dream, hoarsely and desperately.

"He stirs," said a man's voice with concern.

The two men by the boy's bedside first noticed the word on his lips as he silently shouted it in his dream. Then the word took form in the room as barely a whisper: "Help."

The men looked at each other uneasily. With a gesture from the older man, the shorter one pressed his hand gently upon the boy's shoulder.

He opened his eyes. Death no longer pursued him. He was safe...or was he?

The boy lay under a blanket in a soft bed—more comfortable than any he had ever slept upon. Instead of a straw cushion on a dirt floor, he now rested on a raised mattress stuffed with wool.

A small window let in the bright midday sunlight, filling the space with such brilliance the boy could barely keep his eyes open. In between heavy bouts of blinking, he could see that he lay in a very plain room made of rough stone walls. The single narrow window was perhaps just wide enough for a child to squeeze through.

When he tilted his head slightly, a flash of pain shot through the back of his neck. Sensing the cloth bandages wrapped around his skull, he dared not touch them and aggravate this pain. The boy's normally dark complexion now seemed white and pale. Eyes shifting side to side, he studied the men by his bed.

Both men wore long-sleeved black woolen robes. Over each robe draped a smaller sleeveless black garment, giving the impression that they were doubly clothed. Each man clasped a belt around his waist. Simple shoes—heavily tattered—covered their feet.

The older man's face, graced with a white beard and mustache, shone with compassion. A large belly pushed out his robe in the center, the boy noticed. The shorter man—thinner and younger—had no beard; in fact, he was clean-shaven. But he too appeared worried.

Most notably, their hair was cut in a tonsure, although the boy didn't know the name of the style. This haircut left a large bald area on top of the men's heads with a narrow ring of hair circling it. The boy wondered why they fashioned their hair in that way, but he could think of no good reason.

Neither of them appeared to mean the boy any harm.

With great difficulty, the boy finally tried to speak. The words that left his mouth sounded weak and strange to his own ears. "Wh-wh-where am I?"

"Be at peace, child," said the older man. "You are safe here. You were injured but are recovering."

Already tired from the little he had spoken, he stammered, "Where?"

"Harwood Abbey," the man reassured him with a smile.

*Harwood Abbey.*

The words seemed foreign to the boy. He didn't understand where he was and couldn't recall that name ever being spoken to him.

He stared blankly at the men.

The younger one then spoke. "I am called Brother Andrew,

and this is Father Clement. We are monks who live at this monastery.” The man waited for some response, but the boy said nothing. “Benedictine monks, son...do you understand?” he asked kindly. “We devote our lives to God by serving his Church.”

Still he didn't respond.

“What are you called, child?” asked Father Clement.

He considered the question asked by the monk with gray hair. It seemed like a simple question, yet the answer didn't spring to his mind. After a long pause he replied, “I—I don't know.”

The two men exchanged odd glances. Father Clement spoke again, his voice changing to a more upbeat tone. “You must be famished, child. Do you wish something to eat?”

The boy nodded, feeling the pain in his neck. The response to this second question had come quite easily because of the growling in his stomach.

The monks left the room, apparently to fetch the boy food. Lying in pain, he inspected the stone ceiling lit by daylight. Where was he? How had he gotten here? Why couldn't he remember his own name?

A tear welled up in his eye, but he held it back. He didn't know why.

Within minutes Brother Andrew returned with a plate of beans, a small loaf of dark bread, and a cup of water on a wooden tray. He helped the boy sit up in the bed. A wave of dizziness swept over him, giving him pause.

The first few bites of bread were difficult to swallow, but he soon finished without saying anything except, “Thank you.”

Brother Andrew took the plate and departed. He returned a few minutes later and sat on a thick wooden chair next to the bed. His black robe flowed smoothly to the floor.

“Son, do you remember your name now that you have eaten?”

He shook his head again—no.

“What do you recall? What is the last thing you can remember?”

The boy strained. “I...I don't know what happened. I was dreaming and then I woke up here.”

At that point, Father Clement returned to the room and stood silently nearby. After a few more questions, it became obvious the boy couldn't remember his identity, where he

came from, or what had happened to him.

The monks retired to the hallway outside the room to talk privately. But the boy could still overhear much of their conversation.

"He has no memory?" Father Clement concluded uncertainly.

"None, Father," the younger monk confirmed. And he was quite correct: the boy knew neither his name, nor that he lived with his family in the tiny village of Hardonbury, nor even that King Henry II reigned there in 12th century England.

"Has he asked about his home? his parents?"

"Nothing. Not one question, Father."

"By Adam, that is not good." The old monk sounded worried. "I do not think it would be prudent to tell him about his village now. He is weak and confused. Cursed news can wait."

"I agree, Father. The fate of Hardonbury Manor will remain secret 'twixt you and me for now."

"But someone must tend to the boy 'til his memory returns or his family claims him," the man said gravely.

"I do not know how to care for a child," Brother Andrew resisted. "I have my prayers...and my work in the scriptorium. I would not know what to do."

The gray-haired monk smiled and placed a hand on Brother Andrew's back. "Have faith, Brother. This is God's plan for you."

Obediently, the younger monk surrendered his will.

"'Tis settled then," Father Clement concluded. "Now, what shall we call him in the meantime? 'Boy' simply will not do."

"What is a proper name, Father?"

Father Clement considered the question. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then thought better of it. "You choose," he suggested finally.

After a brief time of deliberation, Brother Andrew reentered the room and sat with the boy.

"Son," he said gently, "you have had a cursed accident. Do you remember the tree? You were quite injured. And now it seems you have lost your memory. We do not even know what you are called. You see the problem?"

The boy nodded. He understood.

"We would like to call you something...a name. Considering what you have survived, you are quite a strong lad. I believe I have a fitting name for you for now. Would you like

me to tell it?" The monk's voice was kind and patient.

Aye," he agreed weakly.

"Alexander." Brother Andrew suggested the name simply, with no explanation.

"Alexander," he repeated sluggishly.

Then, as if pressed down by a great weight, he slept under the will of his fatigue....

For more of the story, read on...

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# Don't miss...

## THE Chronicles of Xan

BOOK TWO

# The Haunted Cathedral

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*Darkness crept through the stone alleys of the medieval town.*

*On a grassy hilltop, an ancient castle overlooked a massive stone cathedral in the center of the city. In the mist outside that great church, two boys whispered softly.*

*"It's her, Arthur!" the younger one hissed urgently through chapped lips.*

*"The ghost?" the other asked skeptically. "You're squirrel-brained!"*

*Inside, an eerie light shone through the cathedral's red stained glass, like a glowing ember in a hearth. It moved from one window to the next, slowly and smoothly....*

The road to Lincoln is perilous for the orphan Xan and Brother Andrew. Accompanied by a dangerous prisoner, struggling with doubt and unable to forgive his parents' murderer, Xan will face his greatest challenge yet. But will it come from within himself—or from the dark cathedral, which is rumored to be haunted?

For more information:

**[www.chroniclesofxan.com](http://www.chroniclesofxan.com)**

# Coming Soon...

## THE Chronicles of Xan

BOOK THREE

# The Fire of Eden

ANTONY BARONE

*As the lightning flashed,  
the Magician raised his staff towards the sky,  
chanting in a strange tongue.  
He's calling down a curse!  
Xan stumbled to the dirt as he tried to flee.  
Spinning around, the Magician turned his staff upon the boy....*

Eden's Fire—a jewel of untold worth—is stolen on the eve of Brother Andrew's ordination. In a race against time, Xan must catch the thief and uncover the truth about the mysterious magician living on the outskirts. But what decision will Xan make when he is faced with a choice that will change his life forever?

For more information:

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## Author's Notes

The idea for The Chronicles of Xan series sprang from one of my family's cross-country road-trips during a change in military assignments. I have always loved writing, and have long pondered authoring a Christian fiction novel.

On the drive from Maryland to Colorado, my wife, Alisa, and I spoke at length with our son, A.J.—a precocious, home-schooled eleven-year-old at the time—about ideas for an exciting novel that would keep the interest of today's youth while also grappling with more mature issues of the moral and religious life. From that conversation emerged the concept of *Shadow in the Dark*, including the character of Xan, the location of Harwood Abbey, and the mysterious “shadow” lurking at the abbey.

As I settled in my new assignment, I worked at odd hours of the night and morning to write the story that was unfolding in my mind's eye. Along the way, I prayed for inspiration, researched historical aspects of 12<sup>th</sup> century England, and sought valuable critiques from my family. Though I created Hardonbury, Clovis, and Harwood Abbey, I have made the story true to the historical period and illustrative of life at an English abbey.

After completing the first draft, I worked with Alisa editing *Shadow in the Dark* chapter-by-chapter, making the characters as genuine and consistent as possible. And for the next year, I re-edited the book based on my own honing of the story and the continued inputs of my family. During this time, I also began developing ideas for sequels, continuing the story of Xan. With a near-finished product, I sought review of the work by other published Christian authors, many of whom graciously reviewed the novel and offered kind words of encouragement and suggested improvements. To these I owe a large debt of gratitude, especially Leo Madigan, Tony Perona, Sr. Mary Catharine Perry, Martin Kennedy, Fr. Joseph Esper, and Dan

Flaherty.

Two and a half years after beginning to write *Shadow in the Dark*, OakTara contacted me with interest in my novel after seeing a review in *The Writer's Edge*. With their support, The Chronicles of Xan series has made the final step from the mind of the author to the published page... and finally to you, the reader.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the series and look forward to your thoughts and inputs as the writing of The Chronicles of Xan continues into the future.

For more information about Tony Barone  
and The Chronicles of Xan series:

**[www.chroniclesofxan.com](http://www.chroniclesofxan.com)**

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## About the Author



**ANTONY BARONE** ("Tony"), a major in the United States Air Force, served as both a firefighter and military intelligence officer prior to completing his law degree at the University of Florida and entering the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps.

As a prosecutor and defense attorney, he has presented hundreds of written and oral arguments before military courts-martial, the Air Force Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.

He has also taught law at the U.S. Air Force Academy and published law-related articles in *America* magazine and various professional journals.

*Shadow in the Dark* is his first inspirational novel—a perfect blend of medieval adventure and mystery, while teaching the important values of forgiveness and courage in spite of tremendous obstacles. Don't miss Book Two in The Chronicles of Xan: *The Haunted Cathedral*. He is currently working on Book Three, *The Fire of Eden*.

A father of one boy and four girls, Tony and his wife, Alisa, have been involved in home-schooling for over a decade. He has worked with youth through church ministry, home-school groups, Boy Scouts, and pro-life activities. Born and raised in New Jersey, military service has given Tony and his family the opportunity to experience life throughout America—including Texas, Virginia, Florida, California, and Colorado. He currently resides with his family in Georgia.

For more information on Antony Barone  
and The Chronicles of Xan series:

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