

THE Chronicles of Xan

BOOK TWO

The
**Haunted
Cathedral**

ANTONY BARONE

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“A well-done mediaeval mystery story, laced with plenty of action and a bit of downright spookiness. The complicated but wonderfully satisfying plot leads us through the darkness....”

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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

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, Edward, 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. It moved from one window to the next, slowly and smoothly.

"It's only the priest," Arthur assured him.

But before he had finished the words, a sound stirred from outside the cathedral's vaulted entrance—the clang and rattle of chains drawing together. At breakneck speed, the boys rushed the length of the church and rounded the immense structure. They gasped as they beheld the steps leading to the front entrance.

"There's your priest," Edward called triumphantly, gesturing to the man placing a chain and lock through the great doors' steel rings. "Let's go!"

The pair again sprinted the distance to the cathedral's final green and red window—just as the light quickly extinguished, as if by a ghostly breath.

"See?" Edward exclaimed knowingly. "It's like I said...*she* is within."

"It could be anyone," the older boy protested, but more weakly this time.

"Like who?"

"Like...I..." Arthur fumbled awkwardly. Finally he surrendered to the chill tingling up his spine, standing every hair on edge. He had no answer.

I

Hardonbury Rising

Xan reached for the high stone's rough edge. His chapped and calloused fingers gripped the rock as his bare foot found a place to hold his weight. Sweat, dripping from his dark, tangled hair stung his hazel eyes. A coarse brown tunic scratched annoyingly at his shoulders.

"Take care!" someone called from below. It was his friend, Joshua, ready to encourage but always fearing the worst. "You'll fall!" he said in a harsh whisper.

Xan looked down. Wide eyes filled Joshua's freckled face.

No one else was in sight. Taking leave of the midday sun, the workers were resting over a small helping of bread and ale. But the two boys had stayed behind, alone.

"I've got it, Josh...don't fret!" Xan reprimanded from above.

He was now near the top of the thick stone wall—the third side of Hardonbury's old parish church on the hillside. The wall's surface was black and charred. Months earlier, fire had engulfed it during the village's tragic attack by bandits. All that remained of the holy building was its four rocky walls.

Peering down, Xan estimated the sheer drop to the hard floor below him to be over fourteen feet. To let go could mean serious injury.

His toes felt for the next foothold, passing over a smooth stone until reaching another jutting edge. Aching, the tired fingers of his left hand longed to surrender...but his will refused to give in.

"I've almost got it," he huffed aloud. As his foot found a resting place, his right hand quickly moved to the top stone of the wall. "There!"

But the charred, slippery edge of the surface resisted the

tips of his fingers. Painfully, his hand scraped across the top as he yelped in sudden fear. He now dangled from the wall, barely hanging on. But his left hand still refused to release its grip. In a second desperate attempt, he reached for the top before it was too late.

Help me, Lord!

With a last effort Xan swung his right leg over the wall and pulled his weary body up. As he reached safety, the small hammer he had tucked into his belt slid out and fell towards the ground.

“Watch out, Josh!”

The hammer crashed near Joshua’s feet as his startled friend fell back from it with a cry. Tripping over his leather shoes, Joshua fell to the floor with a thud.

“That was some answer to prayer, Lord,” Xan complained, eyeing his tool that lay fourteen feet below. “Now what?” he mumbled to himself.

Although he had spent the morning scrubbing the bottom of the charred wall, he’d wanted to do something more substantial to repair the church. But now he stared helplessly at the damaged roof before him—with no tools or plan to fix it.

“Xan, you dropped your hammer,” Joshua called out helpfully from below, brushing the dirt from his own black tunic.

Xan ignored his young friend’s news. Instead, he took a moment to survey his situation. He now straddled the parish wall, looking out from a hilltop over the small village of Hardonbury. A cool gentle breeze—a sign of spring—flowed over his hair and glistening cheeks.

From the height of the church wall, Xan could see the path leading into the heart of the ruined village, with its four main fields surrounding what used to be rows of peasant cottages. Looking upon the new construction all over the village, he remembered how just a few months earlier he’d believed that Hardonbury was dead. In fact, nobody at the time had thought it possible to rebuild the medieval town after the bandits’ attack.

But times had changed. Hardonbury Manor—Xan’s home for most of his thirteen years of life—was under new supervision. After the tragedy, Sir Cedric (the former lord of the manor) had given his land rights to the wealthy Lord Kensington.

Xan recalled how the new owner of Hardonbury had promised to make amends for his estate’s role in the village’s

disaster. "With the Lord's blessing," Kensington had vowed, "I will bring this town to new heights! I will repair the great evil which has befallen these poor people."

And Lord Kensington had been true to his word. Within a fortnight of his victorious battle with the marauding bandits, Kensington's workers had traveled from his great manor of Clovis to rebuild the ruins of Hardonbury. Men of all trades had come in force to raise the village from its ashes.

And the remaining peasants of Hardonbury—including Xan—were ready to assist, though their main skill lay in working the fields and harvesting grain. But sitting now upon the old parish wall, Xan felt that he'd never make a real difference.

What use am I up here with no hammer?

"I've got your hammer," Joshua repeated. "Shall I toss it to you?"

Eyeing Joshua's red hair below, Xan guessed at the smaller child's aim. He had a passing vision of the hammer striking him in the head, followed by a great fall to his death.

"Nay, Josh. I think not."

"Hoy, there!" a man's voice suddenly called out in anger. "You up top...get down from there this instant before you fall!"

One of the workers had returned to the site.



After a harsh reprimand by the chief worker, Xan and Joshua were expelled from the parish construction site. Their enthusiasm dimmed, the boys made their way to a nearby grassy hill that was crowned with thirteen crosses set upon burial mounds.

A lone craggy sycamore tree—not yet bloomed in the new spring season—stood solemn watch over the graves. Two crosses, side by side, held the names *Nicholas* and *Helen*: Xan's parents killed by the bandits during that tragic attack.

They stood in a long silence. Joshua bowed his head, as if, for once, uncertain of what to say.

A solitary tear escaped down Xan's dirt-streaked face. The stillness grew thicker and more awkward.

Joshua shifted uncomfortably. "It's all right, Xan," he said quietly. "They're in heaven now."

But Xan gave no reply.

Joshua's words echoed those of Xan's parents many years earlier, when they'd explained to him that his older brother and sister had died during a plague before Xan was born. His father had said then that his siblings were at peace in heaven, where they knew no pain. But Xan hadn't understood at the time.

And now Joshua, his best friend, was telling him that his parents were happy in heaven.

I don't want them in heaven...I need them here with me.



Walking side by side on the woodland trail under a covering of tall oaks and beeches, the two boys left the fields of Hardonbury behind them and headed towards Xan's new home: Harwood Abbey.

Brother Oscar had given them leave to travel to Hardonbury and help in its rebuilding. But the stern old monk who was in charge of the dormitory had warned that if they missed the evening meal, there would be a paddle awaiting them.

As they strode along, a tangled stem of roots from a large beech tree rose in front of them. "Is that the one, Xan?" Joshua asked, gesturing towards it.

"Nay, Josh, it's not that one either."

A few moments later came another question: "This one?"

"For the third time, Josh: *nay*," Xan snapped. "I'll tell you when we get there."

"Sorry," the younger child—only eleven—apologized.

Minutes of quiet passed before Xan suddenly stopped and pointed to a large beech root—twisted and thick. Reaching out from a tangled stem, one bold arm of the root jagged unusually across the trail like a snake.

"*That's* the one," said Xan, more patiently than before. He knew Joshua was very inquisitive—a sign of great intelligence. But sometimes he wished such intelligence could be accompanied by fewer words.

"So you were running—" Joshua re-enacted with his hands—"and then you tripped on that root and smashed

into...*that* tree there?"

Xan nodded and instinctively placed a hand on the scar he could still feel under his hair—the injury that had caused him to lose his memory for a time. On that awful day in the past, the Benedictine monks of Harwood Abbey had saved his life and given him the chance at a new home—and a new identity as *Xan*.

"That must've hurt," Joshua commented, not for the first time.

"I can't remember, Josh, but I'm sure you're right."

"But you're better now," Joshua finished optimistically.

"I suppose so," Xan replied uncertainly.

At least my body is healed.

II

The Merchant

“I will die today,” the merchant muttered fearfully to himself.

The tall man darted hurriedly among the pedestrians that now dotted the town of Lincoln’s bustling streets. Under his arm he held an item wrapped carefully in gray cloth. As he stepped, his eyes scanned from side to side. He sensed danger.

The merchant was dressed as finely as any in the town square on that cloudy morning. His neat green tunic hung over fitted pants that drew down to fine leather shoes. Over his shoulders he wore an embroidered mantle that was clasped at his chest with a green jewel.

“Pardon me, madam,” the man called apologetically as he rushed past a young lady whose pace was far too slow. He strode along a row of short stone houses with quaint wooden doors. Some of the buildings had signs hung above their rounded archways, showing symbols of their trade.

Again the man’s brown eyes searched the street ahead for any potential foe.

“There!” a coarse voice shouted from across the road behind him.

The merchant didn’t wait to see who had hollered—he already knew. Frantically, he sprinted down an alley to his right. At full speed he made a quick left that led down a steep, narrow lane between low rough-hewn buildings. Chancing a backward glance, he sped faster; his pursuer was still close on his trail.

The cobblestone street beneath the man’s feet would eventually lead him to a deep pool—the vast lake outside the city gates at the bottom of the hill. Pounding footsteps behind

the man drew nearer as the pool approached. Its icy waters could provide his only escape...if he could just reach them in time.

"Coward!" a harsh voice roared as crushing arms tackled the merchant's legs.

Crashing to the ground, the merchant fumbled the wrapped item that he held tightly in his arms. It fell with a clatter. The full weight of the man's attacker now held him down, pinned and helpless.

"The Master sends his greetings."

An iron fist struck the merchant hard in the face as all turned to blackness.



"What have you brought me, William?"

The merchant awoke on a cool, smooth floor, the side of his face throbbing and still wet with drying blood.

Peering up cautiously, he beheld a man with a finely groomed mustache sitting behind a grand desk. The seated man wore a stately robe and elegant jeweled chains about his neck. A thick golden ring ornamented his finger. Dressed luxuriously in this way, one might have mistaken him for one of the wealthy land barons of England.

"Stand when the Master speaks to you!" Strong hands roughly lifted William by the shoulders, tearing his green tunic.

Now the Master smiled with artificial kindness. "I am disappointed in you."

"I can explain..."

"No explanations are necessary," he replied, still smiling falsely.

"Please, sir. I—I brought you *this*." William bent to the floor and lifted the item wrapped in cloth that had been placed next to his unconscious body.

"So you were bringing this to me?" the Master asked sarcastically with a smirk.

"I was afraid, Master," William said warily. "I did not know if you would accept this as a part payment on what I owe." The merchant unwrapped the object for the Master to examine.

"Lay it on the desk," the Master commanded as he scratched at his ear with a gold coin. William obeyed. The Master lifted the smooth goblet and studied it closely for a moment. It was highly ornamented and made of the finest silver.

"This is worth a mere pittance of your debt," he said threateningly.

"Aye, Master. 'Tis only a down payment. But might it satisfy you for the present... 'til I can bring you more?"

"You ask much of me," the Master retorted coldly.

A bead of sweat formed on William's forehead. The seconds of silence soon multiplied, but he didn't dare interrupt them.

"Bart!" the Master finally called out.

Immediately, the strong man who had tackled William stood attentively. "Aye, sir? Shall I dispose of our guest?"

William's hand moved slowly towards the leather belt fastened around his tunic. Stowed on the inside of it was a small sharp knife with which he might defend himself. But before his hand found the weapon's grip, the Master spoke again.

"Not for the moment," he answered. "Escort this fine merchant to the alley. He has much work to do—he must pay me in full next week."

William's hand relaxed even as his heart raced. The goblet had bought him precious little time.



The dominating cathedral filled the sight of every passer-by, with its thick walls and stained glass. Its two tall towers directed all attention heavenward. A prominent landmark in Lincoln—almost as great as the formidable castle built higher up on the hill—the inspiring cathedral drew many in from the countryside for both prayer and almsgiving to the poor.

As darkness fell, two booming cathedral bells rang out the evening prayer from the high west tower. Their rich reverberating tones echoed into the deepening night. Eventually all visitors departed and a peaceful silence filled the place.

The priest clamored down a side aisle, putting out the flames of oil lamps and candles with a long silver candle snuffer. As usual, he set out to extinguish all lights save one: the lamp illuminating the golden vessel that contained the bread of the altar—the Blessed Sacrament. That solitary fire should be the only light in the darkness, proclaiming the very presence of God within the cathedral.

Having finished along one aisle, the priest started across the *nave*, which ran widely down the center of the holy site. His footsteps resounded rhythmically. As with all churches of that time, no pews or seats cluttered the vast spaces where worshippers would stand. This wide-open floor plan made every movement within the thick walls sustain itself with a pleasing echo.

Starting as a cold shiver on the back of his neck, the priest began to have the uncomfortable feeling that someone—or something—was watching him.

“Who is there?” he called into the darkness.

But the cathedral’s eerie silence was left unbroken.

“ ‘The Lord is my shepherd...’ ” He began to chant the Twenty-third Psalm under his breath as he continued snuffing out flames. After completing the task, he headed for the tall doors at the entrance to the cathedral. All the while, a growing sense of dread filled him.

“ ‘...I will fear no evil...’ ” He was reciting for the third time when suddenly he heard a faint wailing cry rise into the air. It seemed to come from both under him and around him. With every passing second it grew louder.

This was too much for the poor man. Without another glance into the cathedral, he crossed under the round vaulted exit and shut the heavy wooden doors with a clang.

I must report this immediately!

It wouldn’t be the first report of strange activity in Lincoln Cathedral that week....

For more of the story, read on...

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Don't miss ...

THE Chronicles of Xan

BOOK ONE

Shadow in the Dark

ANTONY BARONE

*A shadow moved toward them...
quiet and ominous.
A frightened voice cried, "What is it?"*

Bandits attack a medieval village. A young boy is injured and loses his memory. He wakes up at a Benedictine monastery and is given the name *Xan*—short for Alexander.

But when the monastery is raided and a monk is accused of a violent crime, Xan must uncover the truth. Could the raid be related to the one that destroyed his village? And what about the shadowy figure Xan has seen lurking on the abbey grounds at night?

For more information:

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:
www.chronicsofxan.com

Author's Notes

This second book in *The Chronicles of Xan* draws upon actual historical events in an even deeper way than Book One, *Shadow in the Dark*. Although I created a parish on the outskirts of Lincoln, pastored by the quirky Father Philip, most of the references in *The Haunted Cathedral* are literally torn from the pages of history.

The history of Lincoln Cathedral—still a major tourist attraction in England today—is both fascinating and stranger than fiction. The cathedral was truly built over the old Saxon church of Saint Mary Magdalene's, although I invented the notion that a crypt still lay hidden under the cathedral. The background involving Bishop Remigius is also true, including the devastating fire that cracked the old bishop's tomb in 1141 A.D.

Most important, there really was an earthquake in England in April 1185 A.D. Listen to how the English historian, Raphael Holinshed, described it:

"On the Monday in the week before Easter in 1185: 'chanced a sore earth-quake through all the parts of this land, such a one as the like had not been heard of in England, since the beginning of the world; for stones that lay couched fast in the earth were removed out of their places, houses were overthrown, and the great church of Lincoln rent from the top downwards.' "

Lincoln Cathedral was literally devastated by the quake, leaving only one wall in good condition—the same

wall that still can be seen as part of a larger wall built by Saint Hugh of Avalon when creating one of the most magnificent cathedrals that stands in the world today! I also relayed other details about the cathedral as accurately as possible, including the existence of two great bells in the western tower of the church.

Similarly, the general history of Lincoln and of Lincoln Castle was kept largely intact, although I did create the idea of the Forest People, descendants of the Danes who dwelled in the land prior to William the Conqueror's triumph in 1066. Finally, it was pure coincidence—or God has a great sense of humor!—that the famed Lucy Tower actually exists at Lincoln Castle, considering that Xan's friend, Lucy, figures largely in the story. These kinds of intriguing details made writing this book a truly fascinating learning adventure that brought medieval history to life for me. I encourage the reader to pick up some great histories about that time and prepare to be amazed!

For Book Two, I strove for deep character development, especially in Xan, Carlo, and Brother Andrew. I wanted Xan to truly grapple with the tragedies of his life, and to finally overcome them. I also wanted the reader to be left with the enigma of Carlo—a good man turned bad, who may have finally made the journey back to the light through the Sacrament of Confession. But we'll never know because Father Philip isn't telling! Nor at this point do we learn the actual fate of the bandit Rummy.

I also must give credit for the ghost of "Nelly" to the tragic story of a young girl who died of cancer in California many years ago, and who was buried on the grounds of an old Spanish mission. That wonderful old place still offers its facilities for retreats, one of which I attended some years ago. The rumors of the young girl's ghost walking the halls of the mission truly left my imagination running wild during that spiritual retreat—with a few close calls that to this day give me chills.

There was so much ground to cover in this novel, and so many threads of the story to keep going, that it was a real organizational challenge. I found that outlining the key story lines and weaving them in and out throughout the story was

an effective strategy. And, of course, endless editing and re-editing to get things right...

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Alisa, and my son, A.J., who continued to help me weed out the extremes and keep the story flowing in a gripping way.

I hope you enjoyed Book Two. I am currently in the planning stages of *The Fire of Eden*, Book Three, and hope for a release in late 2008.

God bless you! Please spend some time visiting my website, **www.chroniclesofxan.com**, for the latest news and activities.

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

www.chroniclesofxan.com

www.oaktara.com

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.

His previous novel, *Shadow in the Dark*, Book One in The Chronicles of Xan series, is a perfect blend of medieval adventure and mystery, while teaching the important values of forgiveness and courage in spite of tremendous obstacles. He is currently working on *The Fire of Eden*, Book Three in The Chronicles of Xan.

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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