

Death Wish

Book 1 of the Refried Trilogy

An
official
Death Wish

Michael D. Young

A SAMPLE FROM THE REFRIED TRILOGY

Death/Wish

Book One by Michael D. Young



One final wish becomes a new quest.

A dying young man asks an immortal wizard to help him meet the family he never knew. The request leads into magical bureaucracy, faded legends, a hereditary curse, and consequences arriving in precisely the wrong order.

THIS SAMPLE INCLUDES

Prologue + Chapter 1

The Refried Trilogy is a standalone continuation of A Wonderful Week for a Quest. New readers may begin here; returning readers will find two centuries of echoes waiting for them.

TURN THE PAGE. THE WISH HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE.

PROLOGUE: WHAT LURKS IN DARKNESS

Sir Roderick XIII clutched the sides of his helmet, wishing it could protect him from his worst enemy: the voice inside his head.

“The Titan army approaches,” it whispered in its familiar voice, silky yet sinister. “If you do not lead them, the kingdom will fall. Is that something you want on your conscience?”

The old knight winced, trying to rise. But all his limbs felt weak, and the fever that raged within threatened to cook him in his own armor. Whatever this voice was, it was definitely not his conscience. The voice of the Lurker, as he had taken to calling it, had been his constant companion since his 18th birthday, feeding his fears and stoking his doubts. If there were one advantage to dying of Goblin Pox, it would be that the voice would finally be silenced.

A shiver ran through him as he considered the terrifying possibility he had entertained many times before. What if this were a voice from the Netherworld, and its

owner would be waiting for him beyond the veil of death? Perhaps he would never be free.

“But even with my help, victory is far from certain. I’ve never seen many of these abominable creatures in one place. My presence might not make a difference.”

The Lurker laughed, a mocking sound that he had grown accustomed to over the years, but never welcomed. “Tell yourself whatever fables you like. You know the great power you possess. If you do not appear on the battlefield tomorrow, in full form, thousands will die. Perhaps tens of thousands. Do you wish that knowledge to occupy your final thoughts?”

A wracking cough shook his entire body, bringing renewed agony each time he exhaled. For once, the Lurker was the voice of reason. He wanted to deny it, but every word was true. He alone could wield the mighty talismans passed down by his ancestor, Sir Roderick, 3RG. Normal soldiers would have little chance against the Titans, with their massive size and toughened skin that functioned as well as any armor.

But the cost of returning to his former state was almost too dreadful to think about.

“If I...” he began, struggling for breath. “...if I pass my curse on, my son...would take it?”

“Yes,” the Lurker said. “Your eldest. And he could pass it down all the way through your line as far as it may go. You would never be burdened with it again.”

Sir Roderick XIII clamped his eyes shut, thinking about each of his many children. He pictured each of

their faces from the oldest to the youngest, imagining the havoc bearing this curse would place upon them. How could he do this?

Visions of others broke into his mind: his soldiers and their squires, the royal family, his friends and colleagues from so many years in the king's service. If he chose to spare his family, he would doom countless other families to destruction.

"And if I die?" the knight asked. "If I let it take me, the curse will be broken?"

"Yes," the Lurker said. "If you voluntarily let the disease wring your last breath out of you, the curse ends with you. But you won't. How could you withstand something that thirteen generations before you could not? You may think you are close to the end, but let me assure you, there is so much more to come: worlds of misery that you can scarcely imagine."

He wished desperately there were someone else who could make this decision. He didn't even care much about his own life anymore, only about the impact his final actions would have. Whether he let the disease ravage him or rode out into battle against the Titan hordes, his odds of survival were slim.

What would his illustrious forebears have done in this situation? They would probably have come up with some brilliant solution that saved the day and let everyone live. But he was not them, and his time to deliberate was running out.

The Lurker said, "What will it be? Will you give

your son the curse, or will you die and doom the entire kingdom?" Sir Roderick's entire body shook with the mental and physical strain.

He needed to decide while he still had the mental capacity to do so, and enough strength to speak. All over the kingdom were statues and monuments dedicated to the former bearers of his name. All of them had performed heroic deeds, had made the difficult choices that no one else could.

If they were ever going to build a statue of him, it would be because he had followed in their footsteps. He had to choose the selfless path: the harder road that would be best for as many people as possible. Their needs outweighed even the needs of his family, though he loved them dearly.

They were good, brave children, so different from one another, bound by the common thread of courage and persistence, passed down through their legendary bloodline.

No matter how softly he spoke, the Lurker always understood. The Lurker gave him the fateful words that would pass his curse on to his oldest son.

"No longer is this mine to bear. I cast it off and leave it there. This burden is no longer mine. I pass it to the next in line."

The knight repeated the lines and hesitated before saying the name of his oldest son.

"Rayden."

Instantly, he drew in the deepest breath he had

managed in as long as he could remember. His lungs were clear, the fog in his mind parted, and the aches in his muscles vanished. His fever broke, and energy flowed back into every extremity. He stood, and for once, it was not shakily, but resolutely.

The entire world had shifted into clearer focus, as though the last torturous years had been no more than a sinister dream from which he had suddenly awakened. He stood, listening to hear if the Lurker would say anything else, but for once, he was silent.

He looked about and found his long, gleaming sword on the wall where he had hung it while he still barely had the strength to do so. He gripped it now, the cold metal of the grip conforming to his hand, as though it truly belonged there. He bowed his head.

It was time to fight. And though his body, his mind, his strength had been renewed, he had never felt so wretched.

CHAPTER 1: AN AUSPICIOUS ANNIVERSARY

Sir Jacques Dawkins sat at his desk, considering a trinket from the past. It wasn't all that impressive, just a little replica of a statue that had once stood close to his estate. The original had sadly been destroyed during a vicious attack. Though artisans were working to restore it, Jacques knew it would not be the same.

He looked at the small replica and remembered all the people he once knew who were honored there. It had been two hundred years to the day, on the 12th of Febtober,¹ when the statue had been unveiled. At first, only a few of the figures were covered with gold leaf to represent those who had given their lives on the quest. But as the years crept forward, the gold had extended to include them all. All except him.

1 If you're wondering why it's called Febtober, do keep up. This is what happens when a calendar reform is handed to a committee and nobody wants to admit they were wrong. Though I was on the committee, my idea to name the second month after Grimbalewaith was voted down.

Sir Jacques started at a knock on his study door.

“Come in,” he muttered, blinking rapidly to clear some of the nostalgia from his eyes. The room grew colder.

From that, he knew it was only his butler, Heebie. Heebie was on loan from the Netherworld, and a more jovial phantom he had never met. Apparently, Heebie’s home had stood on this spot long before it had been Jacques’s. He liked the place and had stayed on.

“Will you be coming down to the celebration, sir?” Heebie asked. “There are some who have... well, noticed your conspicuous absence.”

“How nice of them to notice!” Jacques said sarcastically. “It’s the one day a year everyone in their bean badger notices me, and the one day a year I’d rather spend in the darkest dungeon. At least there it would be quiet.”

“Depends on which one you select, sir,” Heebie said. “I’ve haunted a few in my day, and some of them were positively glamorous. Did I tell you about the one where the inmates started a band?”

Sir Jacques rose, placing the statue back in a desk drawer. “Yes, you have mentioned it. I suppose I’d better put in my customary appearance. I don’t know if I’d say it’s my duty, but it certainly is expected.”

“Well, it is the 200th anniversary,” Heebie said. “They’re going all out this year. I heard there’s going to be a balloon parade. Can you imagine?”

Sir Jacques groaned. If there was going to be anything of the sort, he wanted to be as far away as humanly

possible. They would insist on flying likenesses of all of them. He'd seen such things before. They always made him feel ridiculous. And not since the original statue had anyone been able to get Sir Roderick's nose right.

Heebie coughed. "Lead the way. You'll give a little speech, shake a few hands, and we'll have the carriage ready in the back so you can make your hasty escape."

"Good," he said. "The sooner I can get away from this so-called nobility, the better."

"Right you are, sir. Your escape this year will go off without a hitch. I've checked all the steam engines, greased all the gears, and cleared all the obstacles. I promise a clean getaway."

Sir Jacques paused in front of the grand, golden wooden doors that led to the ballroom of his manor. He drew in a deep breath and muttered to himself, "*It's just one night; then I can throw them all out for the next 364 days.*" Steeling himself, he opened the doors and slipped in, hoping his arrival would go unnoticed.

No such luck.

The moment he stepped into the ballroom, a reporter with an enormous green quill cornered him.

"Sir Jacques, Simons Lander of *The Daily Percolator*. I was wondering if I could have a word?"

Jacques considered for a moment and nodded. "Sure thing. I'll give you one: antidisestablishmentarianism²."

As the reporter scribbled down the ridiculous

2 No one knows what this means. They just trot it out when they want to show off their vocabulary. Don't deny it.

word, Jacques left.

He hadn't gotten more than a few steps when another quillmonger accosted him.

"Lionel Bell of *Refried News*. What do you say to those who describe you as a has-bean?"

Jacques shrugged. "Well, yes, I *am* a has-been. I *am* currently being, and I *shall be* in the future. And you can quote me on that."

He fended off half a dozen more reporters on his way to the podium at the front of the ballroom. He kept his head down most of the way, but as soon as he was safely behind the podium, he allowed himself a glance at the crowd.

They were all of Arbee's³ finest, dressed in the latest fashions. He'd seen many fashions come and go over the years, but this one, this current wave, was perhaps the most puzzling.

Everyone was now obsessed with gears, both functional and nonfunctional. Gears and goggles and straps.

He did not know why any self-respecting man needed to wear goggles to a ball. Were they expecting a food fight? Or to be whipped around on the dance floor so quickly that they needed to worry about flying bugs?

Gears accented the ladies' dresses, the men's suits, and their shoes, many of which were mechanical.

It was all so ridiculous.

3 The kingdom formerly known as "the Beandom" became first the "Refried Beandom," which was often shortened to "RB." I think you can see where this is going.

Clockwork Chic, they were calling it.⁴ He wasn't exactly the high duke of fashion himself, but he refused to take any part in it. Gears brought back terrible memories. But none of these bean-brains had been around back then.

He had seen how much devastation a few little gears could cause. It wasn't all bad, though. Watching their gadgets malfunction: now that was high comedy.

Even now, he snickered as he watched some young noble lose control of his auto-dance steam-powered shoes.⁵ A huge plume of steam erupted from each one, and he flailed about, bowling over anyone unfortunate enough to be in his vicinity. Soon, a few other young men tackled him and removed his shoes, but the steam hung in the air.

Good. It would conceal his snickering from the rest of polite society.

Someone cleared his throat next to Jacques's ear, and he whirled about, ready to blast the interloper into oblivion. But it was only Heebie.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I am a ghost. That is what we do, right? Old habits. So sorry. Anyway, there is a young man who needs to speak with you urgently. He said it's a life-or-death situation."

4 A dreadful name for a dreadful trend. Give a noble a decorative gear and suddenly he thinks he's half genius, half locomotive. The steam is all magically generated so it doesn't fog up lenses or have to be regenerated with water. Still, I swear I'm allergic to it.

5 These were briefly marketed as a way to "liberate those with two left feet." In practice, they mainly liberated one from grace, balance, and occasionally one's left foot.

Jacques rolled his eyes. “Oh, really? Whose life and whose death? We can talk later, after my speech. You did get it for me, didn’t you?”

Heebie held out a scroll tied with a red ribbon. “Here you go. Good luck, sir. I’m sure it will be an oration to remember.”

Jacques snatched the scroll and took a deep breath.

He wasn’t sure he even wanted to remember it. He cleared his throat and took his place behind the podium. An attendant turned the crank on a voice-enhancing device.⁶

The attendant raised the long, bird-beak-shaped device to his mouth. So many things people had once done with magic, they had figured out how to do with machines. The machines had made them lazy.

No wonder he hadn’t had an apprentice in years.

“The Right Honorable Sir Jacques Dawkins will now address us,” the man cried. “Please afford him every respect on this most hallowed occasion.”

The room quieted, and all eyes turned to him.

Glancing down, he unrolled the scroll and immediately bit his lower lip. The bumbling ghost had struck again. Somehow, he had snagged the secret recipe for his grandmother’s five-bean goulash.⁷ If he were to read that

6 Once upon a time, a person either learned proper projection or used magic. Now they strap a metal beak to your face and call it innovation. Amateurs.

7 My grandmother guarded that recipe with the intensity other people reserve for crown jewels, blood feuds, and embarrassing family secrets. No one even knows for sure which five beans she used.

in public, he was sure his grandmother would return from the Netherworld to haunt him. She criticized everything from his cooking to his choice of socks.

But now that all eyes were on him, he had no choice but to make something up.

Hubert pressed his way through the crowd, trying to get a good look at the venerable wizard. He'd heard stories of the great Sir Jacques, and if even a quarter of them were true, he was quite an impressive figure.

He tried to imagine what it must have been like to have been there two hundred years ago when the quest happened. It was certainly more exciting than his life had been. And he'd elbowed his way as far forward as he was going to get.

He leaned against a column, ready to take in every word of the speech.

"My dear friends," Sir Jacques began, "colleagues, aristocrats, and others who snuck in here just for the drinks. I welcome you. It's hard to believe another year has, well, flown on by. Questmas season always makes me nostalgic for the old times, but I suppose that's to be expected. It's easy to look back at what has been and call those the good old days. Everything was simpler back then. I'm here to tell you, however, that it isn't so. They were, well, different days, I suppose. Not better, not worse, just different. Take it from someone who's lived for hundreds of years. As we take these trips around this town, there are always villains, there are always heroes. A

plot to be thwarted, a prophecy to be fulfilled. And again, and again, and again. And just because you exchanged shining armor for... whatever this is”—he gestured vaguely—“I’d say the true meaning of Questmas is: don’t get complacent. Just because my friends and I heroically saved everyone from certain doom 200 years ago doesn’t mean you can sit back and get fat and happy. There’s always evil brewing, whether you open your eyes to it. So on this Questmas, my message to you is: don’t shut your eyes to evil. And when you see it, do something about it. Once you notice a wrong that needs to be righted, it is indeed a wonderful day for a quest. Thank you.”

Hubert applauded loudly.

It was a brief speech, no doubt. Ah, but how he’d worked the title of his opera in there at the end. That was savvy.

The reporters, still scribbling, rushed to the podium. But Sir Jacques turned his back on all of them and hurried off without taking questions.

Sir Jacques’s servant had promised Hubert that he would have some time to speak to Sir Jacques. It was the law, after all, for someone in his state. Hubert pushed forward through the crowd, trying to make headway against the squawking journalists.

But it was in vain. He was about to turn back when he heard a cheerful voice over his left shoulder.

“Step right this way, sir. The wizard will see you now.”

Sir Jacques strode toward the back exit with single-minded purpose. He had avoided taking inane questions so far. But he still needed to get back out of the manor and into his waiting carriage.

Other servants parted for him as he stormed through the kitchen, and his head chef held the back door open.

“Thank you, Phillip,” he muttered as he flew on by.

True to the ghost’s word, his steam carriage was already popping, its bronze and black exterior gleaming in the moonlight. Gone were the days when you needed a footman. Even as he approached, it opened of its own accord, and a tinny voice announced:

“Good evening, Sir Jacques.”

He bounded into the carriage and lay back in his comfortable, plush seat. Once there, he yanked on the lever. That was the signal to move forward.

“Go, go,” he coaxed it.

But as the door creaked closed, Heebie shot in with a young man in tow. The door snapped shut with a click, and Heebie thrust the man into the seat opposite.

The overhead voice announced, “*Have a safe trip.*”

The carriage lumbered forward, picking up speed, even as the whirring of gears and the puffing of steam intensified.

Jacques could hardly believe his eyes. He had gotten so close to a clean getaway and his own butler had dashed it all to pieces.

The young man across from him looked vaguely fa-

miliar. He had dark, wavy hair, a fresh, youthful face, and wore the modest brown and gray suit of a scholar. The man's cheeks were flushed, but Jacques could not miss the expression of relief written all over his face.

"Who in the blue bean blazes are you?" Jacques demanded once he found his voice. "This is supposed to be a private carriage."

The man knitted his hands in front of him and lowered his head slightly.

"A thousand apologies, sir. I don't mean to intrude. In fact, you can drop me off wherever you like once our business is concluded."

"Business?" Jacques asked. "What business could I possibly have with you? I've never seen you before."

"No, sir," the man said. "I am Hubert Veldin, sir. And I—uh, well, to put it delicately, I'm not going to be around much longer."

Jacques arched an eyebrow. "Really? You look perfectly fine to me," he said, studying the man's face for any hint of disease.

"Oh, it's true. All the physicians say I'm a goner. It's an acute case of Goblin Pox. They say it can't be cured. I don't know how long I've got. But I know I needed to come to you. I mean, it's the law, right?"

Jacques drew a quick breath as it all came together.

"I am so sorry. My dear boy, that's ghastly. You're here to get your death wish, aren't you?"

The man nodded slowly. "Yes, sir. I'm invoking my

right to a death wish. You have to grant them, don't you?"

Indeed, he did. He couldn't remember anymore which King Grimble had signed it into law. But any citizen with a prognosis of certain death could ask for a death wish from any licensed enchanter. Under the law, he had no choice but to fulfill the lad's final request, within reason⁸. You couldn't use your death wish to kill someone else or to commit a treasonous act, and it had to be a request within the warden's ability to fulfill. But anything within the bounds of the law, or close to it, was on the table.

"So," Sir Jacques began, "what is it you want? I admit you've caught me at a bit of a bad time, but I will do my best for you. Name it. Would you like a sumptuous meal? Or perhaps to visit somewhere you've always dreamed of seeing? I'll do my best."

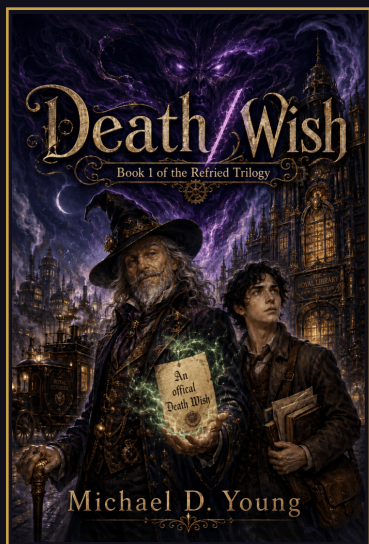
The man fell silent for a few moments, looking down at his lap. He then raised his head slowly and stared into Jacques's eyes.

"I only want one thing: I want to meet my family."

⁸ "Within reason" is the sort of phrase lawmakers use when they want centuries of arguments without having to attend any of them. There are a lot of specific exceptions, ranging from the obvious ones like you can't wish to be king for a day to outlandish ones, like a prohibition on being buried under a pile of dragon's gold. They'd like not to have others perish in the process.

THE WISH IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Ready to continue the quest?



Hubert's official death wish sends Sir Jacques through potion shops, libraries, ministries, moonlight, family secrets, and a curse that has survived thirteen generations.

Death/Wish launches
September 1, 2026.

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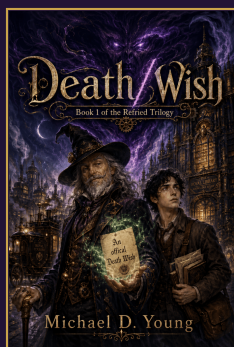
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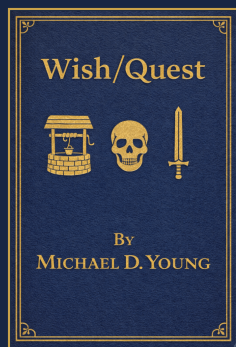
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Death/Wish

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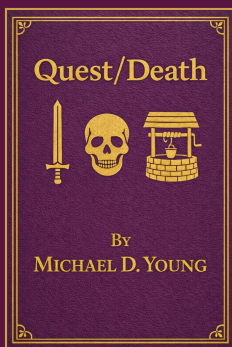
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BOOK 3



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FORTHCOMING

Three comic fantasy adventures about wishes, quests, death, and the terrible consequences of combining them in the wrong order.

EXPLORE THE REFRIED TRILOGY

BOOKS TWO AND THREE ARE FORTHCOMING; THEIR COVERS ARE PRELIMINARY.