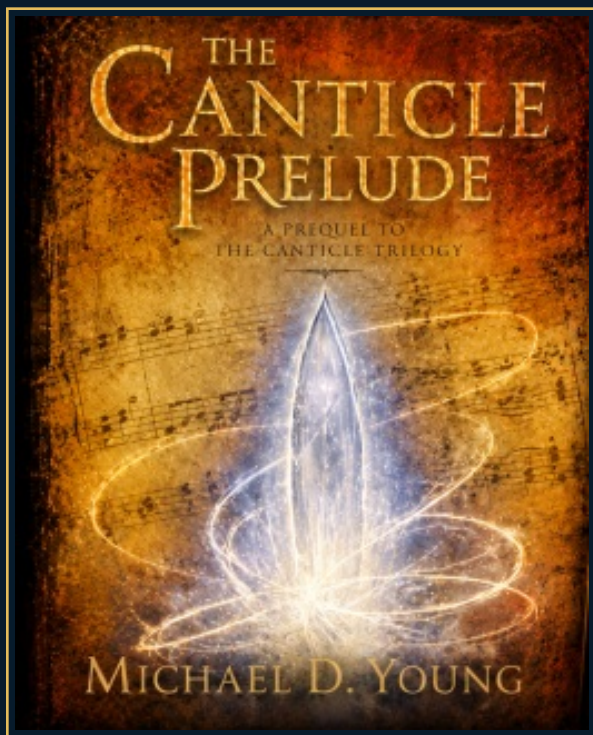


A BOOK SAMPLE



Discover Where the Music Began

Before the enchanted kingdom, before the frozen globe, there was a young musician, a mysterious melody, and a doorway into magic.

PART I: CANTICLE OF NIGHT

Includes Chapters One and Two

PART I: CANTICLE OF NIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

Jorgen Müller paced the front room, his fist clenched. "There must be some mistake, Herr Doktor. I am fit and ready to fight."

The doctor shook his head, gazing down at his clipboard. "I'm sorry, Herr Müller. Your mind and vision are sharp, but your lungs are far too weak. You would not be able to withstand the heat of battle, and that would make you a liability."

Jorgen pounded a fist against the wall. "But, Herr Doktor—"

"No, Herr Müller. The army does not pay me to recommend defective soldiers. We're not that desperate yet. I'm sorry, but I'm sure. I can't sign off on this enlistment."

Jorgen's face reddened. "Is there nothing I can do? I could be a cook or a mechanic. I don't have to be in the trenches."

The doctor pursed his lips. "Everyone must fight, Herr Müller. I see that your father is serving and I have already cleared your brother, Karsten, for service. Let them carry the torch for your family, and you can keep the home fires burning."

Jorgen was glad that his ample beard hid most of his flushed face as he grabbed his cap and turned to go. "Thank you, Herr Doktor," he muttered. "You've saved the army from me."

He slammed the door behind him, and then tore the cap from his head, wringing it in his hands as he showed himself out of the doctor's office.

Jorgen sat on the bus, staring out the window as the streets of his hometown flew by. Not even the familiar brightly-colored buildings or the peaceful snow-capped forests could cheer his sunken soul. He had lived in this city—famous for its gemstones—all his life, and it appeared that he would be living there the rest of his days.

The snowflakes swirled outside the bus window, and Jorgen hummed softly to himself, trying to work out a melody in his head to distract him from the dreariness of the day. The melody had come to him the other day when he had been walking alone in the woods, and had visited his mind many times since in bits and snatches. The more he tried to capture the melody, however, the more it slipped away from him—gone in an instant like a snowflake landing on his ungloved hand.

After a short ride, Jorgen disembarked from the bus at the closest stop to his house, and a half an hour later, he stood and stared at the two-story house he called home. The place had been in the family for generations, generations of carpenters who had trimmed it with exquisite woodwork. Its current lackluster appearance only hinted at its former prominence in the community. War shuffled priorities, and now repairing the house wasn't one of them.

Jorgen paced around the old structure in the snow, biding his time. Surely, Karsten would be glowing about his

future in the military...glory of Germany this...family honor that. Jorgen couldn't take listening to all that now. His fingers and toes, however, grew numb with each passing minute.

Not for the first time, he wished the house had a back door so that he could sneak in unnoticed. Trying to clear his mind, Jorgen stopped and closed his eyes, picturing the eighty-eight black and white keys of his piano in front of him. Letting his mind fill in the sounds made by the keys, Jorgen played through a sonata by Mozart from beginning to end.

On the final repeat, however, he got stuck, playing the same passage over and over in his mind until he threw up his hands in disgust. Even his vivid imagination was no match for the real thing.

With the fear of frostbite setting in, he could wait out in the cold no longer. Like it or not, he would have to face Karsten's maddening happiness. Wanting only to get it over with, Jorgen flung open the front door and dashed toward the back room off the kitchen that served as his music room. As he barreled through the kitchen, he glimpsed Karsten, his brother's mouth full of red cabbage.

Praising his luck at finding his brother incapable of speech, Jorgen muttered a cursory "congratulations" and disappeared into the piano room, locking the door behind him.

Ignoring his brother's protests and insistent knocking, Jorgen sat at the wooden upright piano, closed his eyes and launched into the sonata using the actual keys. As the music progressed, he felt everything else melt away, replaced by a profound peace. He imagined the notes as a magic spell, each individual note a spark of glowing energy.

In three weeks' time, he would cast his spell over an

audience at the concert hall in Kaiserslautern. Then, they would all see that soldiers were not the only ones who could wield power. Until then, his dominion was limited to this single room. Here he was master, but anywhere else, he was an impotent weakling.

He played song after song, rehearsing everything he would present in the concert. His brother's protests lessened and then ceased completely, leaving Jorgen free to play late into the night. At last, he could take it no more and he slumped forward, falling asleep with his fingers still on the keys.

Even in dreams, his mind filled with the music, transporting him from the cares of his waking life. He only wished that he could take the music he heard in his dreams and capture it on paper. He was sure that then, not only would the woman he loves finally return his advances, but his countrymen would finally see him as something more, someone valuable to their society, a man worthy to raise on the pedestal next to the other German masters.

He did not wake again until morning, and did so with a pounding headache. The room contained only one small window, and the sunlight that streamed in did nothing to warm his spirits. It was the day his brother would leave for the front. It was the day of his greatest shame.

consecumque late landae vent la volut offictur sume
officim porerum sam, cusciatiam conest, audit velessit,
sapicipsam que volo vento.

CHAPTER TWO

Jorgen stumbled out of the piano room in the clothes he had worn the day before and slipped through the kitchen, hoping to steal upstairs without being noticed. He was sure he looked more like a vagrant than a member of the household.

Just as his feet hit the stairs, a cheery voice rang out behind him. "Brother, you're awake! Do you have a pillow in there I don't know about?"

Grunting, Jorgen turned around and gave his brother a scowl. To his continued humiliation, Karsten had already dressed in his finest suit, ready to report for duty.

Karsten stepped forward and clapped Jorgen on his shoulders. "I'm so glad you're staying, Brother. I would worry about this place if you weren't around."

Jorgen stiffened. "You mean Mother's ghost isn't enough?"

Karsten shook his head. "No, no, that's not what I meant. It is only that for the everyday matters of the shop, it will be nice to have a warm body."

Jorgen turned away and studied the floor. "I only wonder how long your body will remain warm out there," he said.

"This house does not need any more unseen occupants."

Karsten embraced his brother, an action that Jorgen half-heartedly returned. "Don't worry so much, Brother. I fear no Frenchman!"

"Your courage may not stop a bullet," Jorgen scoffed, "Try to keep that in mind."

"Of course. I'll be back when the war is over, and we'll return this place to its former greatness together. Think on that when the nights grow long."

"Oh, I will," grumbled Jorgen. "Give my best to Father, if you see him." He stepped back and gave his brother a stiff salute. "Aufwiedersehen."

Without turning, Jorgen slunk up the stairs.

An hour later, Jorgen stared at the carpentry workspace, at the many projects that his brother had left behind. Karsten had gone and all had fallen silent. Only the faint ticking of the Bavarian clock accompanied Jorgen's thoughts like a tireless metronome.

As he continued to stare, the projects changed in his mind into worthless lumps of wood, good for nothing but to be thrown away or used as firewood. Unwilling to look at them any longer, he swept the lot from the workspace with a single swipe. What good were battles with wood when battles of flesh and blood raged all over Europe?

Suddenly, the normally familiar walls of his home became an unbearable prison. On impulse, he darted towards the door, not even pausing to snatch a coat to chase the cold. As he stormed into the frosted trees, he did not know where he was going. He just knew he needed to go. Anywhere but here.

Once away from civilization, Jorgen slackened to a leisurely pace. He wandered through the trees, feeling only

the crunch of leaves and snow underfoot. His heart felt as numb as his bloodless fingers. The wind whistled through the trees, rattling their dead branches like the clattering of bones.

He wandered into a clearing and stood still, reveling in the complete solitude. The sun had begun its descent, leaving only a smoky twilight. "What good am I?" he whispered to himself. "If I lay down here, the snow and leaves would cover me, and no one would care."

He wrapped his arms around himself and shuddered, gripped by mental and physical pain and biting chill.

A familiar image entered his mind: a pristine face filled with warmth and beauty. If he laid down his life, Klara would care. She'd march out in the snow and drag him out of his self-imposed grave. Klara would never let him throw himself away.

Jorgen turned his head at a faint sound coming from further within the forest. At first, he thought he imagined the music. It drifted through the forest, a simple yet haunting melody whose tone reminded him of a music box. Opening his eyes, he glanced around to find the source of the music, but saw no one. His interest kindled, he turned towards the source of the sound and set off through the forest, gaining speed as the music gained volume.

In some corner of his mind, a warning bell sounded. This was no ordinary music. It enthralled his senses, intoxicating him and compelling him forward. He had heard legends of Lorelei, who lured sailors to their deaths on the nearby Rhein River. Could she have given up her island perch for a forest den?

Try as he might, Jorgen could not turn from the music's pull. It drew him deeper and deeper into the forest, until he spied a dark shape in a clearing ahead. As he approached,

he found that the shape was a cabin, with a high, pointed roof, its sides constructed of long, dark boards that barely reflected the moonlight. Thick smoke billowed from a single chimney, though no light reflected from the darkened windows.

Approaching the cabin, he wondered if it might be made of gingerbread as in the fairy tales he had heard as a child. Its dark exterior and shuttered windows, however, showed no signs of being of an edible construction.

Before he could get too close to the cabin, Jorgen noticed another figure approaching the cabin from the opposite direction. In a split-second decision, he grasped a nearby tree, holding on to it as hard as he could to counteract the music's draw and keep himself hidden from the approaching person.

The woman who appeared looked vaguely familiar, though he couldn't place her name. Dark, straight hair flowed down her back, and her face was thin and drained of color, as though she was no more than an animated mannequin. She muttered something under her breath as she kept her gaze fixed on the cabin. Jorgen could make out none of it.

He held his breath as the woman stood in front of the cabin's dark front door, which was painted black and flecked with bits of white. Without knocking, she reached forward, pushed the door open, and disappeared into the darkened interior.

A few seconds passed and the music stopped abruptly, releasing Jorgen from its pull. For several frosty minutes, Jorgen peeked out from his hiding place, longing to see any change in the cabin or to catch any noises coming from within.

He continued his wait, starting to lose sensation to more

than his extremities. He longed to enter the cabin and ask to warm himself by the fire, but he resisted. Something about the cabin made him suspect that the owner would not be pleasant toward visitors. The entire structure gave off an aura that he thought might even scare ghosts away.

Just as he had convinced himself to turn back, the front door of the cabin burst open, and the woman he had seen before shot out into the snowy night. The dark door hung open behind her, strangely admitting no view of the interior. Everything inside appeared only as a murky haze.

For a moment, Jorgen hung in indecision, tempted by both the dark portal and the woman tearing erratically through the woods away from him. In an instant, he realized that the cabin would be much easier to find again than the mysterious woman, and dashed after the woman as quickly as his frozen feet would allow.

The woman tore through the forest, seemingly unaffected by snow or debris. Jorgen's chest heaved as he tried to keep up, proving to himself more with every passing second that he was not fit to be a soldier.

At last, the woman burst from the forest in front of Jorgen, heading towards the edge of a sheer drop-off. Still significantly behind, Jorgen tried to find his voice through his gasps. "Stop," he cried feebly, "Stop!"

Without even a slight pause, the woman dashed forward, launching herself over the edge. She fell silently, and Jorgen arrived just in time to see her crumple on the stones far below.

He shielded his eyes as a brilliant flash blinded him. He stumbled back, clutching his face as a phantom silhouette danced in front of his eyes for several seconds afterwards. A wave of nausea hit his body, and he doubled over in pain, retching into the snow as he wallowed in shock and misery.

Dragging himself to the edge of the drop-off again, Jorgen glanced down at the broken body around which a crowd was already gathering. "Why?" he rasped. "Why did she do that? Why couldn't I save her?"

The growing voices from below spurred him into action. He knew what it would look like if he were discovered standing on the edge of the cliff right over the spot where she had fallen.

Many years ago, a man had pushed his brother from the same cliff-top during a heated argument and, as penance, the man had built a church directly into the cliff face. Though Jorgen's only failing had been his inability to hinder the woman from jumping, witnesses would surely think otherwise.

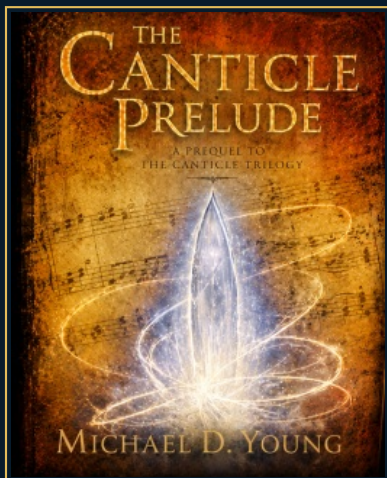
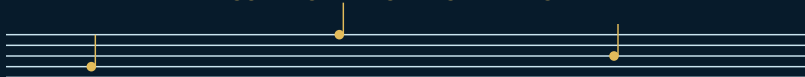
Like a hollow wraith, Jorgen disappeared back into the forest. For the first time, he found himself agreeing with the doctor who had denied him entrance into the army. He was no soldier. He couldn't save anyone.



THE MUSIC HAS ONLY BEGUN



CONTINUE THE CANTICLE PRELUDE



Jorgen Müller longs to prove that music can wield as much power as any soldier.

Then a haunting melody leads him into the winter woods and toward a dark enchanter whose music can change lives - and end them. Read the full prequel and discover the origins of the magic that will shape the Canticle Chronicles.

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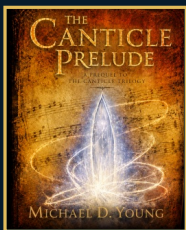


SCAN TO FIND THE CANTICLE PRELUDE ON AMAZON



EXPLORE THE CANTICLE CHRONICLES

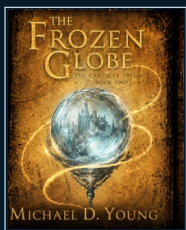
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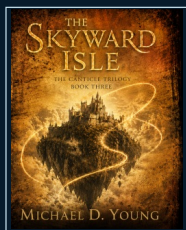
PREQUEL



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BOOK TWO



BOOK THREE

Start with the prequel to see how the enchanted music and the Müller brothers set the story in motion, then continue through The Canticle Kingdom, The Frozen Globe, and The Skyward Isle.

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