



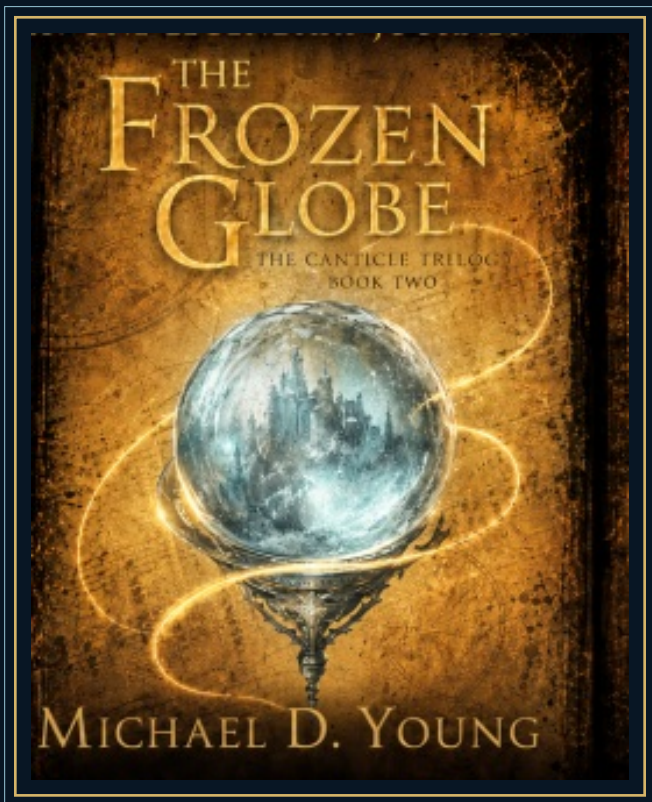
MICHAEL D. YOUNG

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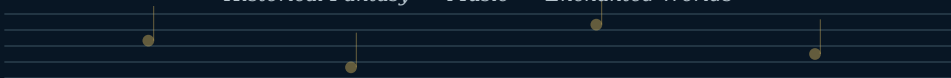
THE FROZEN GLOBE

THE CANTICLE CHRONICLES - BOOK TWO



CHAPTERS ONE + TWO

Historical Fantasy • Music • Enchanted Worlds



A free sample from the second adventure in the Canticle Chronicles



CHAPTER ONE: THE VISITOR

Munich, Germany, January 1st, 1947 The Many-Named
One

What did you say your name was?" A low voice, like a bass note from a pipe organ, replied from the darkness, "I did not say. Nor do I intend to. I have been known by...many."

Vlad, a stocky, bristle-bearded man bundled in furs, shrugged and rubbed his reddening nose. "You're a spook, huh? Well, don't worry. I will not tell." His short chuckle sent out billowing puffs of steam, which rose like miniature smoke signals in front of his face. "That is, if you can really deliver what you promised."

The silence stretched on, as the other figure extended a bundle the size of a loaf of bread, wrapped in brown paper and tied off with string. Vlad snatched the package and fumbled with his pudgy fingers at the pinprick knots. Finally, he could wait no longer and tore the brown paper to expose the contents.

Vlad's wide eyes shone in the moonlight, sparkling like the drifts of snow just outside the window. A stream of

rapid Russian spewed from his mouth, sending the steam clouds in front of his face into a frenzy.

"It is all genuine," spoke the low voice, cutting off Vlad's ramblings. "Now, give me what I am due. I have many miles yet to tread tonight."

Vlad clamped his pale lips shut and thrust his substantial hands into first one pocket and then another. Each time his hand came out empty, and his already blanched face lost all remaining traces of color. His lips flapped soundlessly up and down. Finally, he jabbed his hand into his coat and withdrew a rolled piece of parchment. At once, Vlad displayed all of his crooked teeth and a good portion of his gums.

"This, I assure you, is also genuine. It is in Rasputin's own handwriting and we all know where he got his information."

A hand, little more than skin draped over gnarled bones, reached from the darkness and plucked the scroll from Vlad's grasp. The room fell silent.

Vlad rubbed his fingers together and drew his bushy eyebrows

in until they touched. "Well, aren't you going to read it?" "That will not be necessary."

Vlad stopped rubbing his hands and nodded. "Good. Then I suppose we are done here."

"Yes, you are finished."

A faint rustling crept from the shadows, and Vlad tensed as an even colder blast of air washed over his face.

"Are you cold, Vlad?" asked the low voice. "Well, yes...a bit," replied Vlad.

"Remain here, and I shall correct that problem. I shall go now. Do not leave for five minutes after I am gone. I do not wish to be followed."

"Da," said Vlad. "As you wish. It has been my pleasure."

The floorboards creaked and, a few moments later, a door groaned open and shut. The dark figure's feet left only the faintest outline in the snow. It slunk down the road for a minute, turned, and raised one fist towards the rickety cottage nestled in the woods behind it. Its fingers hung there in a bunch, then snapped open with a crack.

The cottage burst into roaring flames, shattering both the silence and the darkness. The figure lowered its hand and whispered, "I'm doing you a favor. There will be no place in my world for someone like you."

The figure turned, and melted into the night.

CHAPTER TWO: KARSTEN'S VISITOR

The Middlespace

Hand in hand, Johann and Brigitta dashed towards the open portal, anxious to explore the new world that lay before them. Right before they flew through the passage, an enormous figure reared up in front of them.

"Halt," it said with a tone of authority. "I need to see proof of authorization."

The figure was several feet taller than either of them and covered with segmented white armor that gave it the appearance of being an enormous insect.

The two children exchanged a glance, unsure of what the strange being wanted to see.

"Uh, what do you mean?" asked Johann. "Brigitta and I are traveling from The Canticle Kingdom. We want to travel... see other places."

"Extend your right hand," said the figure.

Johann extended his hand, not wanting to see what would happen should he refuse. The armored figure placed its own hand above Johann's, and an intense red light shone onto Johann's skin. It revealed a mark there

that Johann had never seen before, a dot with a long stem trailing off it.

The helmeted head shook slowly back and forth, creating a loud creaking sound. "I'm sorry. This is a restricted route, and you do not have the proper authorization. I cannot let you pass. I shall have to return you to the nearest authorized portal."

Before either of them could react, the figure shot out his hand, and they both flew backwards. Johann had just enough time to glance over his shoulder to see the new door they were heading towards before it swallowed them up.

Idar-Oberstein, Germany, 1948

Johann and Brigitta emerged into the sunlight.

They inhaled deeply, almost in unison, and surveyed the scene that stretched out for miles in every direction—craggy forested hills, shrouded by whips of fog being chased off by emerging sunlight.

Johann turned to his dearest friend, and his grin stretched his skin tight. "Wow, it's...it's..."

"Beautiful," finished Brigitta, trying to rival Johann's grin. "How far do you think it goes?"

Johann spun around slowly, taking in every detail of the landscape. He shrugged. "Hard to say. I can't see any end to it...unless..."

Brigitta leaned in closer. "Unless what?"

Johann arched one eyebrow as if having stumbled on a delicious secret. "Unless the walls of this box happen to be blue."

Brigitta laughed and swatted his arm. "Why don't I use my slingshot and see if I can hit them? Hm? What do you say?"

Johann took a step back and studied his friend. "I didn't

think you still carried that around. You do have a sword now.”

Brigitta reached into her traveling cloak and withdrew her well-worn wooden slingshot. “There are just some things you can’t do with a sword. I don’t think it would have been much help against that fox...fiery...thing.”

Johann placed a hand on Brigitta’s back. “Too true. All right, you should keep it around.” He raised a finger and indicated the horizon. “Why don’t you aim out there? If there’s something to hit, I’ll bet you can.”

Brigitta stepped forward and fished in her pocket for a handful of stones. With carefully practiced motions, she fit one of the stones into the slingshot, took a few seconds to adjust her aim, and then let the stone fly.

It sailed in a straight line into the heavens, and disappeared against a backdrop of riveting blue. They both leaned forward, craning their ears for any sound or change in the blue canvas of the sky.

“Nothing,” concluded Brigitta. “Let me try again.”

She fitted another stone, and then another, letting them fly at different angles, with much the same result. At last, only a single, smooth stone remained.

“I was saving this one for last. It’s from the garden behind my house growing up. If I use it, I won’t have any stones left from our kingdom.”

Johann reached out and closed Brigitta’s hand around the stone. “Save it then. We should at least hold on to some little piece of where we are from. Who knows when we’ll be back?”

Brigitta nodded and for a few moments they stood still and silent. Johann looked down and saw that his hand had been resting over Brigitta’s the entire time. He snatched it back, his cheeks growing warm and rosy.

“Johann, is everything all right?”

Johann stooped and scooped up another small stone. "Oh, uh, yeah, I just found another one that might work instead. You should try it out. Maybe the stones here fly differently than stones from home."

Brigitta accepted the stone. "Here goes nothing."

She let the stone fly, and it disappeared like the rest. They listened for a moment, and this time, they actually heard a noise. Both sets of eyes riveted on the spot the stone had disappeared.

A faint buzzing sounded from the distance, and they could just make out a tiny speck of color near the place Brigitta had made her final shot. Brigitta's breath caught somewhere between her mouth and her lungs.

"Johann, do you see that? Did I really do that?"

Terrifying visions of the white opening that had claimed both Johann's grandfather and Bruno flashed into Johann's mind. "I don't know. We can't do anything about it now."

They watched with growing dread as the sounds grew louder and the object drew closer and closer. As the faint whine grew to a roar, Johann and Brigitta collapsed to the ground, their hands shielding their faces. The object raced over their heads in an instant and continued across the sky to vanish on the opposite horizon.

The noise died away and their eyes met, their faces twisted with terror.

"What was that?" asked Brigitta, struggling to rise.

"Something too fast for your slingshot," said Johann, "Let's get out of here. I don't think you broke this world, but then again, what do I know?"

They both rose and started running along the natural path through the trees.

"Where are we going?" asked Brigitta. "We're heading in the same direction as that thing."

"We can't be too far from the box that holds the Kingdom. Sir Karsten told me he kept it in his workshop. My guess is that this path leads up there."

Brigitta shrugged and quickened her pace, overtaking Johann without a second thought. "Come on, I'll race you there."

Karsten had not been expecting company for lunch. He had labored late into the afternoon until he could no longer resist the savory scent of sausages wafting from the kitchen. He set aside his tools, washed his hands, and laid out dishes on the kitchen table. Within minutes, his plate bulged with hearty food: a pair of thick, glistening sausages, a heap of steaming fried potatoes, and a sweet smelling mound of purple boiled cabbage.

"Sausage to the south, or potatoes to the west...what to do?" He had just settled on a surprise coup of the cabbage, when a frantic knocking on the front door completely shattered his concentration. The lines on Karsten's head became caverns of consternation. "We're closed for lunch!" he called. "Come back in an hour!" Karsten raised his fork and had just scooped up a bunch of cabbage when the knock came again.

"Are you deaf?" cried Karsten. "I said we're closed! Come back later!"

The knocking stopped but was followed by a muffled jumble of voices, which Karsten could not make out. Karsten's fork landed on his cabbage, and he pushed back from the table, trying to ignore the protesting of his rumbling stomach. The knocking resumed and Karsten stumbled towards the door. Maybe the person really was deaf.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" he cried, and then added under his breath, "I wouldn't be able to enjoy it anyway with this

racket." Karsten clutched the door handle and swung the door open, preparing the tongue lashing of a lifetime for the next person he saw.

In an instant, Karsten forgot all about eating. "Johann, Brigitta! What on earth are you doing here?"

Johann grinned, and Karsten marveled at how they had grown. Johann's unruly brown hair had grown even longer, and his stature had filled out a bit so that he no longer looked so spindly. Brigitta had let her blonde hair grow out and was looking much more the young woman.

"Exploring," Johann said. "What else have we ever done together?"

Both travelers wore the red and black armor reminiscent of their master, Siegfried, with dark cloaks draped over their shoulders.

Karsten nodded and motioned them in. "Come, come. It's not the time of year for Halloween, and they don't really celebrate it here anyway."

Johann arched an eyebrow, and Karsten sensed a bit of that mischievous young boy he had first met. "Halloween?" asked Johann. "What sort of holiday is that? Sounds... strange."

They entered the living room and Karsten shut and locked the door. "Well, it's a night that's supposed to be scary, but after all the things you've seen, I'm not sure you'd even work up a sweat."

Brigitta sighed and took a seat in the workshop. "Eh. Not lately. We have both been, well, a little restless. We found our way through the Middlespace and came out in your front yard. We've come to see what's outside the box."

Johann reached down and slid his sword from his belt. With a flourish, he drew a complex pattern in the air and then rested the tip on the floor. Brigitta's eyes found the

ceiling.

"So," began Johann, "any chance you could use our help?"

Karsten expelled all the air in his lungs with a rattling rush. He took a few steps over to his workbench and ran his fingers over his tools. He said nothing for a long moment, then finally looked up and met Johann's gaze. Johann's grin flickered and then died.

"I'm sorry, Johann... this is all just a little bit strange. It's been years and years, but I'm still not used to it. I thought I was old when this whole thing began, but now..." He winced and massaged his upper arm with his other hand. "Well, I hoped things would quiet down after that last adventure."

Brigitta leaned forward in her chair, her sunny hair falling in thick strands over her face. "But it's not?" she asked. "But we banished the Many-Named One, didn't we? I mean, he is gone, right?"

"Perhaps," said Karsten, "but banished is not the same as dead. He has come back in many different forms before, but then he always had Jorgen to help him. I don't know. I don't sleep well most nights. It's all I can do to lose myself in my work." He picked up a hammer and rocked it back and forth with one hand. "I'm probably just paranoid. This place is a bit remote, and now that I live here alone..."

"Alone?" interjected Brigitta. "What happened to Jorgen? I thought you told me that you run the shop together, and that you had some boarders. I mean, isn't that how our kingdom came to be?"

Karsten stopped twitching and set down the hammer. "A lot has happened," he said. "I suppose it would be good to fill you in."

He gestured for Johann to take a seat, which he did a moment later in a wooden chair by the hearth. Johann's

hand rested on an object on the table next to him and a burst of static filled the air. He leapt to his feet, sword drawn and whirled in the direction of the sound.

"Demon! Show yourself!"

"Johann!" cried Karsten. "It's okay, sit down. It's not a demon...it's a radio."

Johann dipped the tip of his sword and then cautiously propped it against the hearth. He lowered himself back into the chair, not taking his eyes off the radio for an instant. "I was taught many kinds of magic, but I have never seen one like this. Is it a creature, or, I mean...it is magic, isn't it?"

A grin broke out across Karsten's tired face. "I guess technology is a kind of magic. Just not the kind you're used to." He stepped over and fiddled with the knobs until the sound changed from static to comprehensible words.

"The Soviets blockade of Berlin continues, prompting Allied powers to ponder the fate of those trapped in West Berlin. The Prime Minister said today that..."

Karsten switched off the knob and returned his gaze to Johann. "It's a way for people to speak and be heard from far away. I know Siegfried had a few tricks to do just that."

Johann grinned at the memory of pouring out Siegfried's bottle on his bedroom floor. "Tip me over and pour me out—yes, he sure did. Now, you were saying, about your brother. Where is he?"

Karsten bit his lip before continuing. "Gone. No, no, not dead. At least I don't think so." He stood and hobbled over to a drawer, slid open the drawer, and extracted a crinkled piece of paper. "I woke up in the middle of the night several months ago when I heard footsteps in the front room. I leapt from my bed and got into the workshop just in time to see the front door click shut. I tried to run after him, but in my haste, I forgot my shoes. It had snowed the night

before and it was either hobble back home or risk losing most of my toes."

Karsten looked at Brigitta and then at Johann and handed him the paper. "Here, see what you make of it. I found it on our workbench when I returned home."

Johann squinted to decipher the jagged writing.

Dear Brother,

We sent the dark one away—but we can't make him stay. He has ducked behind the iron curtain, but it will not be long before he throws it back, and blankets the earth with an even darker covering. He took part of me that I cannot live without and I have gone to become whole again.

- Jorgen

Johann pursed his lips and read it again. After a third reading, he shook his head and handed it to Brigitta. "Has your brother always been so difficult to understand? He doesn't sound like he is in his right mind."

Brigitta ran her hands through her hair in a vain attempt to tame it. "Don't you see? He's talking about him! The Many-Named One. I mean. He of all people would know."

"Maybe," said Johann, "but even if the Many-Named One is here, he couldn't be what he was before, could he? I mean, he really was only half a person to begin with, right?" Johann shook his head and turned to Karsten. "How does it work? Don't you know something about all this?"

"Woefully little," admitted Karsten. "They say I can create magic with wood, but it's Jorgen who did the actual enchantment. He has only told me part of the story, but I believe that Jorgen only became the Many-Named One after he had been possessed by the spirit of a dark enchanter who gave him magical powers. He was fine for a long time after we returned to the shop and started working again, but he just kept drifting until...well, this."

Karsten slouched in his chair as if pressed down by an invisible hand. "So, I guess if you two are here and looking for an adventure, perhaps finding him would be a good place to start. I sure would sleep a whole lot better. What do you say?"

Johann cocked his head to one side and twitched his nostrils in sudden realization. "I think," he paused, "that I'd like some of whatever you are cooking in there."

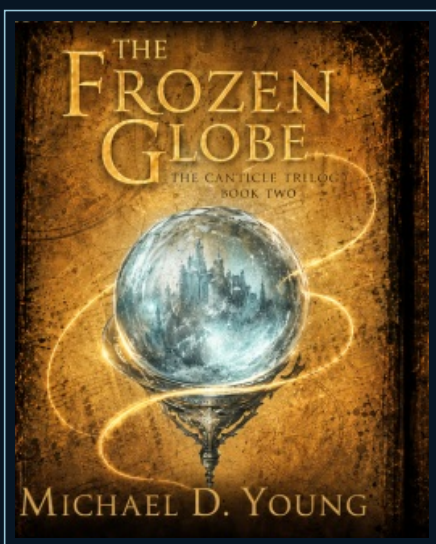
Brigitta's eyes began their trip to the ceiling but stopped halfway when she realized that she completely agreed. "Ah, I'll take some, too." She took a step towards the smell. "Uh, please."

Karsten nodded and thought of how cold his own food must be by now. "All right, come into the kitchen. I'll show you how we cook in this world. There's no worry hearty German cooking can't fix."

Johann disappeared into the kitchen within seconds, but Brigitta held back, her eyes searching the room. The box wasn't there. She glanced towards the kitchen and shivered involuntary. She hoped Karsten's claims about the cooking were correct, because it was going to take a lot of comfort food to drown the dread growing in the pit of her stomach.

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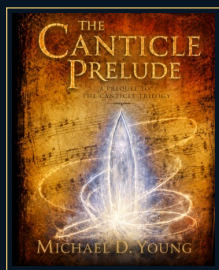
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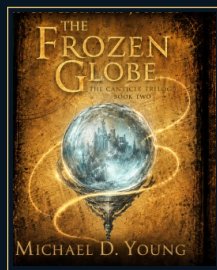
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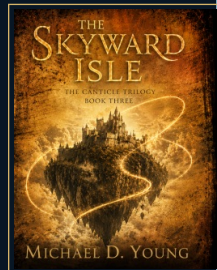
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