

Caleb is an aspiring science fiction/fantasy writer. He has been working hard all semester long writing a thrilling fantasy novel. As more ideas have kept popping into Caleb's mind, there are many more stories flowing onto paper. His selected excerpt is the prologue to his first novel-in-process and it should leave you asking questions and wanting more!

~ Laura Grosskopf, Tutor

Prologue (Followed By a Glossary of Terms)

By Caleb Baeten

His target couldn't see him, none of them could. None of them even knew that they now belonged to him. He always thought that about the ones he was about to kill. His presence is death, his job is death, his name is Death, or at least that is the name that he belonged to.

Death looked down upon the four men below him with a smile on his lips; any merriment this might have once signified never reached his eyes anymore. Hardly any emotion touched his eyes anymore. It is a common saying in the desert city of Shar'Yadin that a man's eyes are a window to his heart. It's no wonder Death's eyes were always empty and cold.

The men he now watched were scanning the area. Three of them arrayed in a triangle pattern designed to protect the fourth man, the target, who walked in the center. *Who this man is isn't a concern*, Death thought, *all that matters is that the job requires his death. He is the target, and a target never escapes my grasp.*

Death watched them from the roof of a building along the road they traveled. It was a short building, covered in the shadows given off by the taller ones surrounding it... just the way Death liked it. They were getting closer and it was time for Death to prepare for work. He drew his AKTed whip-sword and dagger getting ready for the fight to come. Rising slowly from his crouched perch, so as not to draw attention, he readied himself to move.

As the first man in the triangle of protection passed by, Death sprang from the roof, armed hands leading, toward him. *Best to take him quickly to halt the others*, he thought, that's just what he did. Just before Death landed upon the guard, the man in the center of the triangle let out a gasp of surprise at seeing Death coming for them. At the sound the front man turned his head back, just in time to watch Death's dagger pierce his eye and sink in to the hilt. The first man died to the sound of sharpened steel grinding bone and sinking through flesh.

As the man was pushed forward by the impact of Death, the assassin let go of his dagger and rolled to absorb the impact of his fall and came to his feet running, plunging into the shadowy darkness ahead of him. Death then turned back toward the others to determine what course of action to take next.

After a brief moment Death ran out of the darkness back toward the remaining three men waiting for him, angling slightly toward the man on the right. As he passed his first victim he

snapped his fingers, activating the AKTed vambrace on his left forearm. Suddenly Death's empty left hand was holding a bloody dagger; the same dagger that had until recently decorated the dead man's face.

As the next man in his sight started to raise his sword in defense, Death quickly changed directions, moving instead toward the guard on his left. This man was caught off guard as he had been on his way to help his friend. He was quick enough to get his sword up in time to block Death's sword, he just hadn't realized Death had regained his dagger. As the guard felt the jolting of Death's sword striking his own, a small smile appeared on his face, "Not so great after all," he taunted.

His smile slipped from his face as quickly as the blood slipped from the newly drawn slash in his neck. The guard let out a quiet wet gurgle as he desperately clutched at his ruined throat. Death no longer needed to pay him any attention, so he allowed the man to die without the respect of further recognition. He turned once again to the remaining guard.

As Death studied the last remaining guard he took a moment to glance around for his target, he knew right where to look. In the blood bath that had occurred around him, the target had tried to hide away in the shadowed doorway of the very building Death had leapt from. *How poetic that you should seek protection from your end, in the place your end began.*

Returning his full attention to the remaining guard, Death began to dash toward him throwing his dagger toward the guard in the process. The guard easily slapped the dagger away harmlessly and was able to get his sword back in position for the real attack from Death's own whip-sword. It was just ill luck for him that he did exactly what Death wanted him to do.

As the guard's sword moved to intercept his sword, Death spoke the command word for his AKTed whip-sword.

"Halic."

Instantly Death's ridged sword became a flowing whip of razor-edged steel. It connected with the guard's sword, and continued traveling in a new direction that wound itself around the guard's sword and sword hand.

With a quick jerk, Death deprived the guard of his weapon, and the hand to wield it. Death continued the motion and swung the handle of his whip-sword above his head and then gave it a snap toward the guard. The blade lashed out toward the guard who was still gaping at his hand lying on the ground as the whip-sword wrapped itself around his body.

"Cilah," was the last word he ever heard as the AKTed blade once again was made straight and ridged, severing the guard's body into pieces as it did so.

With all of the distractions out of the way, Death was finally able to finish his job. He turned to find his target right where he had expected the man to be... bending down to pick up a dagger...Death's dagger. The target grabbed the weapon and started to run toward Death,

dagger held ready to be plunged into its owner. *Odd*, Death thought, *that he would be the only man of these to attack me.*

Death's lips curled into a smile that once again never touched his eyes as he sheathed his whip-sword. As the target saw Death apparently put his weapon away, he picked up his pace not understanding the lack of recognition Death gave him. As he drew near to Death he saw the cold eyes and slid to a stop. He couldn't restrain a shudder upon seeing the confidence in the unarmed man's stance.

"How do you like this you damned son of a Welne?" the target screamed as he plunged the dagger toward Death's chest. Anger, Death's only remaining emotion, flared within his eyes.

Snap!

The target's empty hand hit Death's chest with a small thud. A look of surprise appeared in the target's eyes as Death looked into them. Then Death's left hand shot up and drove his newly reclaimed dagger into the target's temple with enough force to drive the point out the other side of his head. A spray of blood that coated Death's hand was the target's only objection as Death watched the surprise and then the life, fade from the target's eyes.

Death pulled his dagger free and let the body fall to the ground. Crouching, he cleaned his blade on the clothes of his latest target and then returned it to the scabbard on the small of his back.

Death looked at the four cooling bodies around him, oddly laid out in their original triangle and considered the ease of the assignment. *Now time for a bonus*, he thought. Lifting his right hand out in front of him Death spoke for the first time since the battle started, "Come, you are mine." At that instant the bloodstone ring on his middle finger glowed with four bright tiny pinpricks of light.

As he walked away from his completed task he said to the dead bodies, "The vermin will feed well tonight." With that he walked into the shadow of the building he had initially started from and was gone, leaving the bloody scene without a sound.

Glossary of Terms

AKT: (act) An acronym that stands for Applied Kinetic Transference. It is a form of magic that has been harnessed in the world of Valroarn. It refers to stealing and using of the potential energy a dead person once had, to do things not normally able to be done. The longer a body is dead before collection of their energy takes place, the smaller the amount of energy collected. Bodies dead for more than eight hours have no energy to collect.

Desert of Clouds: A large desert on the eastern side of the continent of Layria. It is the largest desert in the world of Valroarn. It derives its name due to the continuous cloud cover over the entire expanse of it. The clouds that cover the Desert can not be explained. All that is known is that in all of recorded history, there has never been a rainfall. The Desert is an extremely hostile place.

Gathering of the Soulless: The one week celebration held in Shar'Yadin on the vernal equinox, due to daylight striking the city. It is referred to this way by the rest of the known world due to the senseless acts of violence, sex, looting, and other mob mentalities that the citizens of the city do during this celebration. To the residents of Shar'Yadin the celebration is known as the Time of Clarity.

Layria: (lay-ree-a) One of the three known continents in the world of Valroarn. It is known for its large desert and also its large population of Earth Valri. It has one major city, Shar'Yadin, and numerous small settlements on its western edge.

Shar'Yadin: (shar-ya-deen) A large city on the edge of the Desert of Clouds. Due to its location, Shar'Yadin is overcast in darkness nearly all year long. This has given the city the nickname of the City of Night. On the weeklong period when daylight finally reaches the city, the populous holds a bawdy celebration that is thought of as the most depraved time of the year.

Time of Clarity: See Gathering of the Soulless.

Valri: (val-ree) Four types of Valri are in existence. These are Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. Each Valri order relies on a strict code of conduct that must be obeyed at all times. The Valri are empowered by a force known only as the Val. The Val come in the four different classes but there are countless Val on the planet.