

Reviews for *Beyond the Gateway*

Reapers reset the bar for Bryan Davis books, with a tight plot, a protagonist I fell in love with on page one and his equally loveable friends, a dark world with a thin veil between natural and spiritual, and intricately woven themes of life over death, sacrifice over selfishness, and the quest for light in the darkness. This trilogy is the *Esther* of the Davis canon, and I've waited patiently (most of the time) for book two.

Beyond the Gateway picks up immediately where we left Phoenix, Shanghai, and Singapore, takes off running, and doesn't stop. If anyone had any doubts about the spiritual content and themes of *Reapers*, they can be assured of utmost satisfaction and then some in *Beyond the Gateway*.

We have met the best this world has to offer, and he is not enough. Righteous heroes are not born overnight, but are forged, hammered, and fashioned in the deepest of sorrow. With Phoenix, I have experienced hate, love, fear, cravings for the fruits of good and evil, confusion, longing, despair, and hope.

Everything I loved about *Reapers* is magnified in *Beyond the Gateway*. Mr. Davis exceeds expectations and brings a few highly unexpected twists before the end. I look forward to the final installment.

— Kaci Hill, Co-author of *Lunatic* and *Elyon*

The path is unclear, people are treacherous, and Phoenix's own heart is torn. With so much against him, can he find the light glimmering *Beyond the Gateway*? This story is the perfect second-step in The Reapers Trilogy, answering just enough questions to make me want more.

— Cadi Murphy, Editor for Geeks Under Grace

Beyond The Gateway miraculously managed to be even more thrilling and captivating than the first novel, *Reapers*. Again I was up late, reading for hours straight, unable to stop consuming this amazing story. It is by far the best sequel I have ever read, and I am already itching to read the third installment.

— Natasha Sapienza, I Am Resistance Productions

Wow! I thought *Reapers* was a marvelous read, but *Beyond the Gateway* topped it in so many ways. I loved how the story progressed, the characters developed, and the tension increased. And the ending. I loved the ending. The twists were amazing. Mr. Davis never ceased to keep me on the edge of my seat and my tear ducts ready to open. Well done. Bravo.

— Christian Johnson, Student

BEYOND
THE
GATEWAY

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The Candlestone
Circles of Seven
Tears of a Dragon

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BOOK 2 OF THE REAPERS TRILOGY

BEYOND
THE
GATEWAY

A NOVEL BY

BRYAN DAVIS

Beyond the Gateway

Book 2 of The Reapers Trilogy

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CHAPTER ONE

Phoenix's Initiation Ceremony

“PHOENIX, I BROUGHT ghosts with me.” Hanoi’s breath reeked of stale whiskey as he draped my cloak—made of my own hair interwoven with flax—over my shoulders. “You need to prove yourself.”

I pushed my arms through the sleeves and glanced at my Reaper-training graduation certificate on a nearby desk. “I already passed the tests. The initiation doesn’t call for—”

“A Council member asked for a demonstration.”

“A Council member?” I pointed toward the floor’s braided rug. “Here? In my house?”

“Merely an observer, though I understand your anxiety. If the Council is taking an interest in you, the Gatekeeper must have his eye on you. That’s enough to make anyone uncomfortable.” He fastened the cloak’s clasp and plugged it into my sternum valve—a metallic adapter that looked like a double gate joined by two hands, the fingers of each hand curled around the other’s.

When he locked the clasp in place, a stinging sensation pinched my gut. The surgery that embedded the valve and attached it to my heart had been too recent to allow for complete healing.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I brought two easy ghosts. You won’t have to dematerialize to reap them. Make it quick, for your mother’s sake.”

I nodded and eyed the door to this cramped den. In the living room, everyone waited for my entrance, including Misty. I had to make her proud. With my mother being held captive because of her resistance to my upcoming departure, and my father holding a grudge against everything associated with being a Reaper, Misty remained as the only person in the room who really cared about what I felt. She cared about the real me hiding under the cloak.

I pulled the cloak’s hood over my freshly shaved head. “Let’s go.”

Hanoi opened the door. Chatter and the odor of beer and pizza filtered in. Keeping my shoulders back, I walked into a mass of people holding plastic cups and plates.

A curtain of silence fell. At least thirty heads turned toward me. My father stood near a punch bowl, his eyes the only pair staring somewhere else—aloof, as usual. I spotted Misty to his left. Her fiery locks made her easy to find, and her bright smile lit up the room. A tall woman stood next to her. Blonde hair draped her cloaked shoulders, and a white tribal-like mask covered her face. Black lines outlined the mask’s facial features—expressionless, as if hiding a secret.

I avoided eye contact. She had to be the Council representative. They always kept their identities a secret.

Misty called with her distinctive Scottish accent,

"Ah! You look dashing—" She glanced at my father, then quickly turned her gaze downward and rubbed a pewter ring on her finger.

I read his expression—firm lips, plunging brow—utter disapproval of this "foster-home wench," as he once called her. But no matter. Reaper service would keep me away from Misty for twenty years. He had nothing to worry about.

As I walked to the center of the room, the crowd parted and lined the walls. I scanned the faces and spotted pairs of glowing eyes—a stooped man in tattered military garb, a teenaged girl wearing a bloodstained prom dress, and a scar-faced man clutching a bottle.

I blinked and counted again. Three ghosts? Hanoi said two.

Hanoi stepped in front of me. "Raise your right hand."

I did so, though I shifted my gaze from one ghost to the other. Since ghosts were often unpredictable, I had to be ready for anything.

Hanoi cleared his throat. "I, Phoenix, do solemnly pledge to uphold the principles of the Reaper's Code."

As I opened my mouth, a woman called, "Wait."

I turned toward the voice. The masked Council member stepped forward and pointed at me with a long, rigid finger. "Why should I believe your pledge when you have ignored the souls in our midst?"

I squinted. "You can see them?"

"Of course." She drew her cloak's hood over her head and closed in, her steely eyes, visible through the mask's holes, locked on me. She whispered, "Reaper, I detect fear within you, but do not pay heed to it. Remember that your mother waits in captivity for you to complete this

initiation, and your success here is the only way to guarantee her safe return home.”

Behind the woman, the scar-faced ghost stalked closer to Misty, his glowing eyes trained on her. I had no experience with hostile souls. I had been taught that they could do physical harm only to Reapers, though they sometimes invaded the dreams of normal humans and drove them insane.

I shouted at the ghost, “Get away from her!”

The guests looked around, whispering, some with fear-filled expressions.

The ghost sneered. “I am her next nightmare.” He leaped on Misty’s back. She gasped, and her face paled.

I lunged and whipped my cloak over the ghost. When the fibers adhered, I wrenched him to the floor. He plunged a hand through my sternum valve. His icy fingers grabbed my heart and squeezed with a compression that felt almost physical.

Cold shot through my body. Every limb stiffened. I looked at Hanoi and squeaked, “Help!”

Hanoi took a hard step forward, but the masked woman raised her arm, blocking him. “If a level-two ghost can kill him, his district will be better off without an inferior Reaper. Let him stand or fall here and now.”

Misty dropped to her knees next to me. “You can do it, Phoenix!”

Her words brought a surge of warmth. One of my arms loosened, and my hand disembodied. I curled my phantom fingers around the ghost’s throat and pushed him away, drawing his frigid hand out of my body. With my physical arm, I wrapped him in the cloak again and

focused on the energy coursing from my sternum valve and through the cloak's fibers.

As the material clung to the ghost and absorbed him, he screeched. His face elongated, and his glowing eyes exploded into dark mist. Seconds later, every particle vanished into the fabric.

The nightmarish screeching continued, though muffled by my cloak. I unplugged the clasp from the valve, silencing the noise.

Misty crossed herself and rose to her feet. Her eyes offered silent congratulations, and her trembling smile expressed pride in my victory.

Sitting on the floor and heaving shallow breaths, I looked up at the masked woman. "Now for the other two ghosts."

"In a moment." She crouched and spoke in a low tone. "Very impressive, Phoenix. Most Reapers your age would have failed this test. In fact, I have never seen a thirteen-year-old conquer such an antagonistic ghost."

"Then why did you—"

She set a cold finger on my lips. "Never mind." As she lowered her hand from my mouth, her metallic eyes drilled into me. After a few seconds, she nodded. "Yes, I think you do have the gift. I will watch you closely." She reached into her pants pocket, withdrew a tiny cloth bag, and dangled it from a string in front of my nose. She blew across it, sending a syrupy sweet aroma into my nostrils. "Soon, you will not remember meeting me." She rose and hurried out of the house.

When the door closed, Misty reached to help me up, but my father stepped in the way, grabbed my wrist, and

hauled me to my feet. “Now that you’ve proven yourself, let’s get on with it.”

His words felt like the ghost’s icy grip. Although he never physically abused or directly insulted me, coldness made him as loving as a frozen statue. Without a doubt, he loved my mother. If only he had spared a few embraces and kind words for his son.

After reaping the other ghosts, I stumbled through the ceremony—reciting my pledge, then receiving a weapons belt for protection in a remote city, far from my parents... and from Misty.

Hanoi escorted me outside to a limo waiting at the curb. The door opened, and the masked woman called from the backseat, “First the Gateway to deliver the souls, then the airport. There you will be able to say good-bye to your mother, and we will send her home.”

I slid in next to the woman and looked back. Misty waved from a window, her expression hopeful. I managed a weak wave in return.

A large hand snapped the drapes closed, hiding her from view.

I shut the door. The limo pulled away, and my house faded from sight. I sighed and fingered my own pewter ring. Separated from Misty and my mother, twenty years would feel like an eternity.

CHAPTER TWO

Nearly four years later – After the corrections-camp escape

GHOSTS RARELY SHOCKED people anymore, especially Reapers. We were accustomed to seeing the souls of the dead. We carried them in our cloaks, conversed with them, comforted them, and, at times, even scolded them. Nothing in the invisible realm surprised us.

Yet, when the phantom image of Singapore hovered over my hand as I clutched her photo stick, my heart pounded. She was just a hologram, not even a ghost, but she still haunted me far more than any ghost ever could.

Sing posed with her hands folded in front and her cloak's hood raised. Her eyes pierced deeply—intense, determined, focused. The whites around her brown irises stood in contrast to her milk chocolate skin, black cloak, and dark mood. She was a Reaper on a mission.

Shanghai stood next to me below my apartment. Early morning sun shone on her from the alley opening. The light revealed rips and bloodstains at the elbows and knees of her Reaper ensemble—forest green pants, black