

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Introduction - Of Wielders and Wellsprings

****Author’s note: DO NOT SKIP READING THE INTRODUCTION.**
There is always crucial additional information provided in the Introduction passage!

The world of Holst was a wild and untamed land full of dangers from the skies, the land and the seas. The only protection the people had were the ones called Wielders, those few men born with the talent to wield the magic of the land to protect and shelter. Wielders were always men, in the history of Holst, not a record existed of a woman being born a wielder. Wielders could use the energy in the land to shape magic and battle the beasts and natural dangers that threatened the land and its people. A Wielder could use any source of natural power to manipulate magic to protect the people of Holst. A Wielder was the most revered profession in the land and all Wielder’s were highly respected and given rest, food and lodging in any village he chose to protect, even if they never stayed long and had wandering feet while young and unmated and looking for his perfect Wellspring of power.

A Wielder became even stronger when his Wellspring was found. A Wellspring could be either gender but was usually always a woman and they naturally and instinctually were born capable of drawing out energy from the land, collecting it like a pool within them from which their Wielder would drink. A Wielder and Wellspring pair would always be drawn to each other and more often than not, once they connected together as a pair, would never part from each other. Love was a foundation that made stronger bonds between a Wielder and his Wellspring.

It also was quite genetically common for a Wielder to be highly possessive of his Wellspring. Once he found, connected and mated to his match a Wielder was likely to kill a man over just looking at his Wellspring. It was a side effect of their deeper bonding of power. Once a Wielder supped from a matched Wellspring, he was a man possessed and would never lose the desire to drink of the power his match fed to him. It was more addictive than a drug and more potent than an aphrodisiac.

Male Wellsprings were rare and it was even rarer they bonded permanently to their Wielder. Male Wellsprings were often kept at hand just as an extra source of power in emergencies from which many Wielders could drink from simultaneously during battle. Male Wellsprings often died young, drained of power and used until the breaking point. It was accepted truth and it was the norm that a male wellspring was kept apart from others in his village, knowing that his duties were to the people and the land and not to himself. They did not socially interact; they were objects and tools and made no familial attachments.

Knowing their fates were short lived and the fewer people to love him, the fewer would be hurt when he died.

After all, Wielders were always male and the Wellspring he was fated to partner with in life would be more than a source and bolster of his power, but a mate to bear his children and keep his bed warm at night. Very few Wielders would choose a male to be his Wellspring and certainly no children could be bred from such a pairing. It was imperative that Wielders and Wellsprings passed on their powers to their offspring; it was a hereditary trait that needed to be carried on for survival.

Male Wellsprings being the exception, they were not encouraged and in fact forbidden to mate. They were a genetic anomaly and it was not a desirable trait to be passed on to children. If a Wielder's son was born as a Wellspring and not a Wielder he was immediately given to the temple to be raised apart, severed from his family at birth. It was an insult to the Wielder's pride to have a son that did not have his gifts and rather than get attached to a child that would die before the parents, the parents gave him to the temple scholars to be raised and taught his duties to the people.

He was village and public property, he was less than a man, he was simply a village commodity, a source of power for wandering Wielder's to use at will and drain dry.

It was the way of Holst for centuries and not to be questioned but to be accepted...

This is the tale of how those laws came to be in existence, the story of Young Prince Perdain, firstborn son of King Pendergar and Queen Gergaine, crown Prince Royal and heir to the throne of Holst and fraternal twin brother to Prince Fenderack born just five minutes after Perdain and as unlike as any twins could be.

The first and most important difference being their gifts. Pendergar was livid that his firstborn was a wellspring. Everyone knew male wellsprings only meant one thing. The child would grow up to be a non-breeder which meant he'd take no queen and have no heirs.

"He's bloody useless! Bent over like a woman he'll be!" Pendergar shouted and Gergaine was beside herself as she held her twins.

"He's your son! There is nothing wrong with being a non-breeder. The Gods made him this way!"

“How can he rule when he’ll have no sons of his own?”

“He can name an heir! One of Fenderack’s children can follow him!” Gergaine said and Pendergar snorted and stormed out of the room disgusted and Gergaine wept bitter tears.

She loved Pendergar with her whole being; she had since the moment she’d bonded to him as his wellspring. However, he had a horrible temper, would not listen to her advice and he was exceedingly stubborn and arrogant. The only person he treated with respect was Gergaine and even then that was limited. She was a woman and his wellspring and he loved her, of that she had no doubt. However, beyond love it ended. Pendergar, like his father before him and his father before him was raised in a man’s world. He was raised to be a king, to be superior and to be so utterly arrogant with Pride above other men.

Pendergar saw having a male wellspring as an affront to his masculinity, a failure in producing a strong aggressive heir. Wellsprings by nature were serene and unassuming. Small of stature and physique and delicate of form. It was the power they possessed, it robbed them physically but made their inner beings vastly stronger to their wielder counterparts.

Wellsprings were the foundations the Wielders stood upon, their support, their power, and their life’s breath. Without the wellspring a wielder was halved, only able to grasp the limited power the land gave them. With their match, the wielder was complete and bound body and soul to their destined source of matched power and they knew it and which was why they cared for and nurtured their wellsprings above all others. Why they possessively clung to, claimed and owned their mates with ferocity.

To lose the source of power once bonded to it, they would lose their very lives themselves. The wielder’s biggest weakness was power. He thrived on it, lived on it like fuel to his body. He was unable to create his own power as all living things created power. He was devoid of that capability by Godly design. He called power to him from birth. First suckling it from his mother wellspring, then learning to drink from the land and then culminating the cycle by bonding irrevocably to his own wellspring as an adult and gaining his ultimate source of sustenance.

Wellsprings made up the opposite end of the spectrum. They created more power from themselves than a hundred men combined. They were power generators from birth and on top of such vast capabilities of creating power; they also collected it from outside sources. They sensed the flow from all living things and that power recognized the wellspring and flowed toward the bright beacon of a living node of power.

Like the land had “hot spots” of power where rivers or ley lines of power flowed and collected in natural sections of the land, the wellspring was the hottest node of them all. Mobile and ever able to sustain, purify and collect power.

Regular land nodes were unstable and could easily become tainted by surges of mutated power, power that had become violent like a sickness and recoiled and churned like a storm. The wellspring however was immune to taint, their bodies natural purification systems. When power passed through a wellspring’s body it was cleansed and returned to the land.

It was why only bonded pairs ever fought against rouge land nodes. An unmatched wielder could never tame or use tainted power, it would hurt him physically unless the power had already passed through his bonded wellspring and had been purified.

Both Wielders and Wellsprings sensed power, could feel it and taste it in all living things. However, how they reacted to the power was what made them who they were. The wielder could touch, taste and feel but could not hold, he could only hold and absorb just what he needed to survive and the rest he used and bent to his will.

The Wellspring could also touch, taste and feel and only hold the power like a well held water and direct the flow. They could not stop the flow entirely, they could not alter the course or bend it, and they could only hold it and cleanse it and then release it back to the land or their wielder. The only way a wellspring could be harmed from power is if the flow coming into them was too great and too strong. The tainted power filling up their internal well faster than their bodies could cleanse it. In reverse, they could also come to great harm if the power going out of them was greater than they could produce themselves or gather from the land to supply.

There had been reported cases of unmatched wellsprings trying to provide to many wielders simultaneously during pitched battles and the strain of so many drinking from the well at once would drain it dry just like land wells that held water.

Once dry it was useless and in the case of a wellspring, they would die if drained to the point of emptiness. They would snuff out like a candle in the wind. This was the primary reason bonded wellsprings supplied power only to their bonded wielder. Their wielder would protect the well from drying out and protect his life source as well.

Gergaine looked at her sons resting in her arms. One a delicate Wellspring, contentedly sleeping in his mother’s arms. The other already an aggressive wielder. He was already suckling power not only from her, but from his brother and this shocked Gergaine. Fenderack should not be able to tap two sources but

he was, perhaps it was because they were twins and had shared a womb so long but it troubled her.

She said nothing, hoping her worries would be petty concerns and be unjustified. Perdain didn't seem affected after all. She'd watch them both closely, only time would tell in the end.

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Act I - A Father’s Betrayal and A Brother’s Malice

As the years passed, Gergaine’s worries multiplied. Pendergar always favored Fenderack. When the boys had been toddlers Pendergar played often with Fenderack and Perdain was left to amuse himself with his mother, his father’s affection reserved only for Fenderack.

When she would confront her husband about his preferential treatment he’d snort and say that the wellspring was her duty to care for and leave it at that.

As they grew into young boys Gergaine was at her wits end. Fenderack bullied Perdain to the point it came to physical abuse and she’d had to discover this on her own, because Perdain never told a soul he was being tormented. She’d had to catch Fenderack holding his brother’s head under the fountain water almost drowning his twin and in a panic she’d dashed in to save a sputtering Perdain and seven year old Fenderack just grinned. His eyes almost evil to her.

“What have you DONE? You could have killed him!” Gergaine shrieked as she held a coughing Perdain in her arms.

“So? Even Papa says he’s useless.” Was all Fenderack said before strutting away.

Gergaine was stunned and she marched in to see her husband demanding he punish Fenderack and her heart stopped when Pendergar barely looked up from his papers.

“Boys will be boys. He is useless.”

“YOUR SON ALMOST DIED!” She gasped and Pendergar shrugged.

“He didn’t, did he? No harm done.” He said going back to work. Gergaine rushed out of her husband’s office furious and if he wasn’t going to teach Fenderack it was wrong, she was going to.

She spanked him and yelled and sent him to bed without supper and she was appalled to find out her husband had undermined her punishment and sent Fenderack his supper in his rooms.

The next day Perdain had a black eye and the servant had to tell Gergaine it was retaliation for the spanking Fenderack had received. Gergaine didn’t know what to do, if she punished Fenderack, Perdain was retaliated against, if she did nothing he was still abused.

Pendergar didn't seem to care and in fact encouraged Fenderack's overly aggressive behavior.

She had to separate them somehow, she had to make sure Perdain survived because if the abuse continued, he'd die. Perdain unlike his brother was very smart and he loved to read and learn so Gergaine packed him up one afternoon and took him over to the city temple.

"Perdain, Father Rembrooke here has agreed to become your personal tutor. I know how much you like to learn and he's promised to teach you all you want to know. He has a room all ready for you and everything and you can use the archive library here whenever you wish." She said and Perdain turned his eyes up at his mother.

"I'm going to live here?" He asked looking afraid and Gergaine wanted to cry, but it was for his best interests.

"Aye honey. It'll be fun for you and Mama will come every day to see you." She said and then Father Rembrooke squatted down to his eye level. He was a fairly young monk with very kind deep brown eyes.

"Your mother tells me very good things about you Your Highness. I think we'll have much fun learning together you and I. We'll play games of knowledge, read books about dragons and I'll even teach you how to paint. Your mother says you're quite artistic."

"I like to paint, but my brother always ruins them. Is Fenderack coming too?" Perdain said and Gergaine shook her head.

"No dearest, just you. You know how your brother hates school. He won't ruin your books here I promise." Gergaine said and although not wanting to leave his mother the thought of Fenderack not destroying his books or his pictures anymore sealed the deal and he was happy and he liked Father Rembrooke's kindly smile and eyes. Therefore, he happily followed the monk and his mother into the temple and into a room that would become his fate and future.

It had all begun with good intentions and those first few years in the temple were glorious. He adored Father Rembrooke; he was his mentor, his teacher and his best friend. Father Rembrooke always had time to share, always had compliments for how well Perdain was doing. Father Rembrooke never called him useless, never belittled him when he struggled over something, never said a harsh word and always encouraged Perdain to grow and expand his wonderful mind.

Gergaine came everyday faithfully and they'd lunch together in the Temple Gardens with Father Rembrooke and finally Perdain had learned how to smile. Her gentle, loving firstborn was safe from harm and flourishing under the care of the monks in the temple and Perdain finally had a male figure in his life to look up to, to emulate and to teach him all the things his real father had failed to do.

She had specifically chosen Rembrooke for many reasons. He was of a similar age as she, he was a noted scholar in the temple, a fine and talented teacher and he was a non-breeder. He could educate Perdain that he was just as normal as the next man and give him the guidance he lacked at home.

It seemed to be working well as Perdain grew from a child into his very early teens and the only contact he had with his twin was during storms where Perdain would climb to the bell tower and open his well to aide the wielders and other wellsprings in the city in their work. Fenderack in these moments always reminded Perdain of those hellish early years in the Palace.

Fenderack was brutal; he ripped power out of Perdain with a ferocity that on more than one occasion had left Perdain singed and charred and the edges of his well raw and bleeding. Rembrooke was always furious afterward as he cared for Perdain and nursed him through those times.

He was only thirteen, newly of age to work as a full wellspring and even before he was legally of age Fenderack abused the wellspring of power. Rembrooke never failed to report the abuse to Gergaine and Gergaine would in turn go to her husband and son and neither of them seemed bothered.

"He's got to learn how to adjust his flow Gergaine."

"No damn it! I am a wellspring too if you remember and I bloody well know how this works Pendergar and you know it too. We cannot control flow if a wielder is purposefully in there holding the well open and not allowing us to adjust flow! Fenderack knows this too! He's always abused Perdain and you always let him! When will this STOP?" Gergaine demanded and Pendergar just waved his hand at her.

"Let me think on it. Go see Perdain and tend him." With that Gergaine was dismissed and she knew nothing was going to be done, he was just placating her.

Gergaine rushed out of the audience chamber and a youth of about twenty was standing there. He was a handsome Wielder in from the Northwest and currently the King's favorite and rumored to be up for promotion to King's Own for his honor and integrity. He bowed to the Queen and his eyes spoke volumes as he stood. "For what it's worth your majesty, I agree with you My Queen. You have

my vow I will try to protect your son. No wellspring unmatched should be without some protection.”

“Tarnack, you are a dear boy. I thank you but I know my husband has other plans for you. You will be traveling much in the years to come for us, even if you can only shield him when you are in the city I will be grateful of it.” She said and Tarnack nodded.

“I promise Your Majesty.”

“You’re still un-bonded I hear. It is rare for one of your age not to be.” She said as they walked down the corridors and he escorted her back to her chambers.

“Aye . Not yet I have not, no. I know my wellspring is out there somewhere, I’ve just yet to find him. There are much fewer male wellsprings than female ones. Mine will be harder to find, but I have faith one day I shall cross his path.” Tarnack said his smile hopeful.

“I hope when my son’s comes he will be as good as you Tarnack.”

“I hope better My Lady. The Prince will need more than I. I’m a simple country wielder with no head for court matters. Not to mention younger than I, He’s only thirteen now, much too young to be bonding to someone my age.” Tarnack said and Gergaine nodded.

“Currently that is true. Those years however seem less when you are older. Even Pendergar and I have a large age difference. I was only fourteen and he a man of twenty and four when we bonded. I was quite scared then but as the years pass those ten years between us seem less and less.” Gergaine smiled as she reached her room and she entered leaving Tarnack alone in the hall.

It pained him too see the heir to the throne relegated to living in a temple just to protect him from an abusive brother. What Tarnack saw of Fenderack he detested. He was glad Perdain was the heir, he feared what a man like Fenderack on the throne would be like.

Fenderack was cruel, maliciously so and the father failed to see how his spoiling and lack of discipline was adversely effecting the Prince. He’d heard horror stories from the servants of how on several occasions Perdain had been beaten and tormented and almost drowned in the garden fountain and whenever Gergaine tried to discipline her son, Pendergar would undermine her authority and virtually reinforce the bad behavior with a reward. In turn Perdain would suffer even more in retaliation.

Tarnack’s father would have never stood for his sons fighting like that. Their backsides would have been raw with his belt if one had tried to almost murder

the other. Then again, the behavior would have never gotten to that point in the first place. At the merest sign of poor behavior they were punished and sent to bed without supper and none of Tarnack's six siblings had been favored over the other. They were all treated and loved equally. It boggled Tarnack's mind how a father could so blatantly favor one child over another. He could not understand the concept it was foreign to him and it made him appreciate his father and the morals and values he'd instilled in all his children even more.

Tarnack's father did not love Tarnack any less because he had grown up to be a non-breeder, the thought never even crossed the man's mind. In fact on more than one occasion Tarnack's father had joked that six of his seven children were going to provide him with more than enough grandchildren to spoil and Thanked Tarnack jokingly for sparring his purse for future mid-winter and birthday presents.

Politics and the City did not suit Tarnack; he had only come to the city on request by Pendergar recently. He'd been traveling Holst the minute he passed his Crown Sanctioned Wielder's Ranking Exam and passed with excellence and honors. He had been itching to travel the world and did so immediately. Since he was a novice of sixteen he and his horse Belle, a beautiful white mare War Horse, had been on the road working.

He was incredibly strong and could tap nodes a hundred leagues away if needed for power. He had a long reach and it served him well. Being able to tap distant sources enabled him to work almost on par with bonded pairs. In some cases even better and he was the only wielder able to work a rouge node alone because he could use unaffected nodes far enough away to help contain the raw power until bonded pairs arrived and the wellsprings worked and purified it.

This was why he'd been called to the city. He'd managed to hold an entire town shielded for two days alone until wellsprings could arrive. The Mayor of the town had written the King without Tarnack's knowledge extolling his virtues and it seemed he hadn't been the only one.

Several letters had come to the King's attention over the years that Tarnack had been unaware of, he'd just been doing his duty as he'd been raised to do. He had a gods given gift to use to protect the people and the land and Tarnack was highly spiritual and wholeheartedly believed in the Gods divine wisdom. If they gifted him with power and he failed to use it to the best of his abilities to honor them he was no man at all and insulted the Gods who had blessed him. His gifts were not to be used for personal gain; they were to be used for the benefit of all. That was how he had been raised and how he believed.

This apparently has impressed many people, including the King. Tarnack felt slightly overwhelmed and embarrassed about it. He had not done these things for a reward, but he'd been called to receive one.

His name had been entered onto the list of candidates for the highly distinguished King's Own title. The council was deliberating with the King on who was best qualified for the distinction and title and only those who met the highest of standards would be given the title. Every year Wielders and their Wellsprings who showed outstanding merit and honor were called to the city and sometimes all of them gained King's Own distinctions and sometimes none.

Tarnack was the only un-bonded wielder on the list, usually a handicap in these debates and he wouldn't know if he'd gained a title that would make his mother cry until noon tomorrow.

The dreaded hour couldn't come soon enough, he wanted out of the city. He hated the noise, he hated the intrigue, he hated politics and he hated the lack of fresh air. It was too congested and made him almost claustrophobic.

He made his way down the street toward the Inn he'd been staying in. A nice pub on the upper end of town, just a few blocks over from the gorgeous city temple in gilded gold. Tarnack could see the gleaming bell tower from his room window.

The Cock-n-Bull was a small tavern Inn. It had been around for years and passed from Owner to Son for decades. It also was the only place in the city for men only. It was a non-breeder sanctuary in a sea of mixed gender Inns and brothels. The first owner had been a non-breeder and it was tradition that he adopted a son to raise to become the next owner. The only rule being the Cock-n-Bull remained non-breeders only. Prostitution was not allowed either. This was for men coming to share companionship with other men who understood the difficulties of being a non-breeder. Sometimes they developed romances, other times it was just friendly conversation over good beer, good food and fine music.

The rooms were reserved for travelers or those couples that had formed a liking for each other and wished to carry on their conversation and other needs in private and in mutual consent. These were not rooms one could rent for the hour for a rough and tumble bedding, these were romantic rooms designed for lovers or in Tarnack's case. Weary Road Wielders.

He entered the Pub and the current owner named Haddy smiled. His partner of over forty years, Rugger, had passed recently and all that remained was Haddy and thier adopted son Deen. Haddy had probably once been a very beautiful man, he was petite and Deen now towered over him. Haddy and Rugger had raised him as their son. They'd literally rescued him from a horrible and brutal life. A child prostitute he had been when they found him bleeding in an alley and torn in two at the age of thirteen. They'd brought him back here and tended him and made him their son legally. Deen was now almost thirty and his mate, Wren, who resembled Haddy almost eerily, was serving dinner to a pair of lords and laughing gaily.

Tarnack mused even non-breeders tended to pair off to other men that reminded them of their parents like breeders. To this day Deen had a justified phobia of being penetrated, but Wren was the opposite and like Haddy was the least aggressive of the pair. He suited Deen's specific needs and the love was genuine and very real. They'd been married almost seven years and looked like they'd make the long haul just like Haddy and Rugger had before them.

Tarnack liked the warmth the Tavern created, the power within was always flowing smoothly and it made a nice comfortable haven in the middle of a chaotic city. It was how Tarnack had found the Tavern in the first place.

Every Inn he'd tested had varying power signatures and this was the only one he found that was stable. It had a long history and the power had settled into a node under the building that was constantly fed with good energy from the occupants of the building itself. It made for restful sleep and for calming Tarnack's frayed nerves.

He walked over to the bar and Haddy smiled. "Tarnack love you look like the world jumped up and bit you in the ass." He said and Tarnack chuckled.

"Perhaps Haddy. You know country bumpkins like myself don't mix with cities well." He said as Haddy placed a tankard of beer in front of him.

"No they sure don't most times. But there's more on your mind son." He said and Tarnack sighed, the old man was highly astute.

"Just troubled over things I have no control over and no head for. Politics baffles me. Laws I understand. The bending of them to suit needs frustrates me." Tarnack said and Haddy nodded.

"Oh Aye. Laws change to suit the lords in power lad. That's all the understanding of Politics you need. The rest is smoke and mirrors and sometimes just ugly injustice."

"Corruption is a foul thing and sadly rampant in this city." Tarnack sighed drinking from his mug and Haddy nodded.

"We're all just praying Perdain takes the throne eventually. Father Rembrooke comes here often and I hear wonderful things about that Prince. Good solid values he has. Rembrooke is proud of him."

"So the rumors I hear too. They're Twins as different as night and day I've heard." Tarnack said running fingers back through his light brown almost blond hair and his pale greenish golden eyes looked tired. He was quite a handsome

man, tall and broad of shoulder with a body fit and trim from constant physical activity in the out of doors. Naturally honed muscles toned by a life of hard travel.

“Aye. Rembrooke says Perdain wouldn’t even consider swatting a fly without considering the consequences of his actions. The threat to his person versus the life of the insect. You see that painting on the wall over there?” Haddy said pointing to a portrait of the city as viewed from the bell tower and in it the building that housed the Cock-n-Bull.

“Aye. I was looking at that this morning. It makes me want to climb the bell tower and look at the city. From up there it seems to be beautiful.” Tarnack said and Haddy nodded.

“Perdain painted that and gave it to Rembrooke who gave it to me. He’s got quite a talent doesn’t he?” Haddy said and Tarnack nodded.

“Aye he does. I’d have never suspected a child painted that.”

“He’s not so much a child anymore. Thirteen now.”

“So is his twin and he’s about as petulant a child as I care to see.” Tarnack and Haddy both shivered.

“The horrors I hear about that child curl my toes. My butcher supplier was telling me he was delivering meat to the palace and watched that boy pluck the feathers off a live peacock and laugh. He’s not right in the head. I think there is something not right with that boy.”

“I’d believe it Haddy. It’s no secret Perdain lives in the temple just to protect his life. Everyone knows Fenderack almost drowned him once. I can’t imagine what else Perdain put up with before that.” Tarnack said and Haddy nodded.

“Oh Lordy Tarnack the gossip has been flying since those two were born. It started in the womb between those two. Servants have loose lips and everyone knows the King isn’t happy his heir is a wellspring and not a wielder. The lords aren’t happy because everyone knows male wellsprings are non-breeders so no heirs are forthcoming from Perdain’s loins. I’ve even heard tell Fenderack as a baby was robbing Perdain’s well and Rembrooke was in here sobbing the other night because that last storm we had in Fenderack almost killed Perdain again on purpose.”

“That I know. The Queen is beside herself and I wish to the Gods I had the power to intervene here. I just pray that Perdain’s wielder comes for him soon, it’s his only real protection.”

Tarnack felt the surge of distressed power moments before a man came bursting in with news. "You're not going to believe this! Everyone listen!" He shouted hopping up on a table and everyone turned to look at the young lord.

"I just came from the council viewing gallery, it's madness! Even the temple masters were in chambers shouting outrage! The lords and the King have issued a proclamation! All male wielders are henceforth considered anathema and all un-bonded males are to be delivered immediately to their local temples! They are forbidden to mate unless bonded. They are stripped of all rights and titles. They are to sever family bonds at birth and are considered public property to be used as public wellsprings for the betterment of the people. They are forbidden to refuse any wielder access to his well, he is forbidden mind speech to them, he is as of today considered a gift from the gods to the people only and his sole purpose is to lay down his life willingly for the people. He is not allowed contact with anyone other than the monks in the temples. All Wielders are now forbidden to enter temples that contain male wellsprings. Only if a bond is formed by use of the public well will the Male wellspring gain permission to breed and leave the temple. He is considered the personal property of his bonded wielder only, he is to serve his Wielder master and the people only!" The man said looking frantic and Tarnack was pale, ghostly pale.

All his hopes of finding his mate gone, whichever wellspring out there for him was now considered nothing more than a public power depository. To be used and bled dry until he died. Being ripped away from his family and forced into a prison and death sentence. Tarnack's blood ran cold.

"There's more! Perdain has been disinherited, proclaimed anathema as a male wellspring and stripped of all his titles and he is forbidden to ever leave the temple. He is forbidden contact with his family and is as of today given to the people as public property. Fenderack is now the heir to the throne!"

The tavern erupted in chaotic shouting. "MADNESS! THIS IS JUST A PLOY TO PUT FENDERACK ON THE THRONE!"

"IT'S A CURSE ON ALL NON-BREEDER WIELDERS!"

"THE ONLY REASON THEY CAN'T KILL THEM OUTRIGHT I BET IS BECAUSE THE MONKS INTERVENED! GOING AGAINST THE GODS WILL THIS IS!"

Tarnack couldn't breathe, his eyes were stinging and filled with pain and fear and Haddy laid a hand on his arm. "Oh Gods, Tarnack your mate is out there."

"I know Haddy and will be lost before I ever find him. Oh Gods someone tell me I'm dreaming a horrible nightmare and this is not real." Tarnack sobbed looking defeated and eyes turned to him in pity.

“Tarnack, it’s not fair man. I pray your mate runs and his family protects him for you. Any man who’d give up his son to this willingly is mad! Older wellsprings are losing everything including basic human rights and being jailed for just being male and the babes will grow up ostracized. This is a dark day and I am so very sorry for you my friend.” Deen said and Tarnack was numb with horror, his face a blank emotionless mask.

“Excuse me.” Tarnack said, holding in his anguish as he proudly climbed the stairs up to his room and shut the door and sobbed until he was raw.

Haddy was not about to leave him alone in his grief and after a few minutes followed Tarnack up the stairs to provide him a soft shoulder to cry on and rage against in despair and shattered hope.

Wren brought up wine with sleeping power to help Tarnack sleep that night; he was emotionally exhausted and crushed in spirits. His hope extinguished and replaced by soul devouring despair.

Perdain was sitting in his chair in his room when Rembrooke broke the news to him and surprisingly he didn’t cry. He just sighed and turned his face to the window. “Father, I saw this coming for a long time. I’ve already been living this lie for years, they’ve just made it official now and sadly all others like me have to suffer my father and my brother’s hatred of me along side me. It’s them I pity, not myself. Those like me unmated will be ripped from their loving homes and forced into celibacy and excommunicated from humanity. Their wielders will go un-bonded, forbidden to enter the temples and only allowed accidental bonds. Logically they had to leave that clause in there for those bonds or else they’d lose the pair if it was allowed to go unconsummated. Unpaired the Wielder will live, but once he’s paired exceptions to the rule must be made to accommodate his life. It’s as simple as that. I knew years ago this was going to happen eventually. So did you my dear friend, so did mother.”

“You’re taking this awfully stoically Perdain.”

“Do I have a choice? Will tears change the fact I have always been a shame on my father’s misguided and misplaced pride, a source of anger and jealousy for my twin, a source of sorrow for my dearest mother? I wish now Fenderack had killed me as a child, because if he had other wellsprings like me would not have been made to suffer just to get me out of the line of succession.”

“You should never wish for death my son, you are a wonderful soul.”

“I only wish it had happened for the sake of others like me. I have no desire to die Father. If I had the power to go back and change the past I would. However, I do not and never will so I can only make empty and futile wishes. My death would have spared many. Alas, I survived and now many suffer. It is a pain in my heart I will always carry. Male wellsprings will be abused and used until they die because Fenderack wishes to have the final word in this. That clause is specifically designed for Fenderack, giving him sanctioned permission to drain me dry like he’s always wanted to and has always tried to since we were babes. I entertain no false hopes in this; I know my fate will be death at his hands. It has been a long slow torture and I know my brother, my death will be long in coming and painful to bear. He will use this to torture me because he has been denied me physically for the past six years.” Perdain spoke with a wisdom and insight far beyond his thirteen years and Rembrooke was reminded again why he loved this child like his own son.

“He is beyond cruel, he has a rouge malice in him that has always frightened me. He thrives not on cleansed power like other wielders; he purposefully disrupts and taints the power to absorb. If you placed my brother on top of a rouge node he would explode with power and turn Holst into a butchered wasteland. He is corrupt down to his very soul. I pity most his poor wellspring; he will abuse her but not kill her. He will use torture on her as he does on me un-bonded. He will turn her well upside-down until she loses the purity in her and becomes a shell and a source of rogue power. All of Holst is facing dark times. If my father thinks he will be long on the throne with his favorite son standing behind his back with the knife poised he is the biggest fool of all. He is blind to Fenderack’s murderous intent. He has nothing to stop him now, he’s been named heir. Mark my horrible words Father; my parents are not long on this earth. He will destroy them.”

“We must get your mother out.”

“It won’t do any good Father. When one dies they both will and taking her away from her bond will hasten my brother’s ends and weaken my father. Together they stand a better chance of fighting Fenderack than apart. Warn them of my worries, yes. At least my mother who would listen to me. My father obviously has never cared what I said. However I cannot write her and she is forbidden contact with me now. You’d have to tell her Father of my fears, my hands have been irrevocably tied.”

“I will go at once my Son. I pray to the gods you are wrong, but in my heart and in my mind I see the wisdom in your insights. How I wish you were my son, you make be very proud Perdain.”

“You have always been a father to me Father Rembrooke. I love you dearly. I too wish I had been your son.” Perdain said and smiled. His large grey-blue eyes filled with sadness and his long dark sable hair braided loosely over his shoulder. He was the most delicate looking of children on the verge of becoming an adult.

Even if his maturity and mind had already reached adult potential his frame and carriage was still very much that of a slender boy's.

His face was stunning to behold and always had been. Beauty fell far short of the mark when describing him. He looked neither male or female but hovered and balanced between the two. Like his mother, he was fair of skin and dark of hair, so brown it was almost black and subtle golden and red highlights shimmered almost burgundy together in the sunlight. She had come from a noble family and for generations their coloring had been dominant and passed down from parent to child. Their most striking features were always their eyes. Grey eyes that held blue tones that looked like the sky and the sea mixing to create a storm. Haunting and striking eyes. They held mysterious qualities that seemed to run deep in the lineage of the bloodline. Both Fenderack and Perdain had inherited that lineage from their mother's blood.

However, whereas Perdain, like all wellsprings was petite and lithe and suffered the stunting of growth all those with his gifts suffered he also was blessed with the qualities those gifts tended to replace the lack of growth with. All wellsprings had eyes that could see into people's very souls. They always looked kind and deep. One could easily get lost in the comfort a wellspring's eyes always seemed to emote naturally. He was blessed with the wellspring's trademark even temperament. More apt to sit docile, submissive and calm while studying everything around them and absorbing information like living sponges. Prone to follow rather than lead unless the situation required leadership and then they were marvelous at guidance.

They were naturally non-aggressive and opted for logic over prowess in dealing with arguments. They rarely raised their voices in anger, were not likely to start an argument but were disposed to direct the argument to their preferred outcome. They were masters of subtle manipulation of people, they could read and understand complex emotional stimulations. They were the wielder's backbone of support, the level head of reason that tempered a wielder's sometimes volatile nature. They were the council, they were the comfort, they were the steady rock that wielders anchored themselves to.

Perdain was the epitome of a strong wellspring. He was small and beautiful, wise and patient and always calm. Even when faced with a death sentence he sat there in acceptance and his pity was not for his own fate but was reserved for others. It was the others like him that made Perdain's heart weep and bleed in sympathy. It was others that he considered first above himself.

Qualities that would have made a wonderful King in the end. He would have guided people with love rather than fear. He would have considered all the consequences of any action before rendering a decision. He would have put aside his own desires in deference to what others wanted and let the voice of the people themselves dictate the course of his actions, unless the course of those

choices had far reaching consequences. Then he would have first voiced this concerns before overruling the people and call for another vote. He could already see the drastic and long term consequences this new proclamation would cast out into the future and he not only wept for the male wellsprings living now, but for all male wellsprings yet to be born.

This was a pain that went deep into his soul and would be a burden on his heart for the rest of his life. This is what set apart Perdain from others; the nobility of his soul was a beacon of light and understanding. This was a boy who could have potentially been the greatest King Holst had ever had sit on her Throne. However, forces and twists of fate had imprisoned him and now he sat waiting for death, unable to be heard and silenced forever. Betrayed by his own father and condemned by his brother's greed, avarice and jealousy.

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Act II - Tarnack’s Call to Rebellion

Outrage, fear and despair choked the city and countryside. Tarnack moaned in his bed. Every node in the city was quivering on the brink of disaster, being fed angry power from the people. His headache was blinding and every wielder and wellspring in the city was affected.

During the night two families had fled. Taking their wellspring sons with them, reports had been coming in of three other families refusing to turn over their sons and orders from the crown were issued that if the wellsprings were not given to the temples, the families would be fined one hundred thousand each. If they still refused to comply with the proclamation, the wielder and wellspring parents would be considered traitors to the crown for harboring the anathema and for monopolizing public property and have their powers sealed and they’d be excommunicated.

That addition to the law sub-text had the older wellspring sons running from their parents to the temples to spare them in fear of harm to those they loved.

It was chaos and upheaval and all of Holst was shouting outrage and despair and the subsequent turbulence of power was setting off an equal instability in the land’s power matrix itself. All across Holst wielders and wellsprings were being effected by the debilitating sudden flux in power.

Perdain, already weak from the last storm and still recovering was living in his privy. His stomach purging the angry power from his body in a physical manifestation. Rembrooke stayed by his side and offered what little comfort he could.

Tarnack was blinded with pain in his skull and could not stand without getting violently dizzy. He couldn’t even read the letter that had arrived for him granting him his new status as King’s Own. A title he now loathed. Any King who could write these laws was not a man Tarnack respected let alone wanted to be a vassal servant for. He had to be feeling the disruptions himself, could he not see the error of his ways? Could he not feel the madness and the rebellion and recoiling of society as a whole?

If he couldn’t, then he was not a man fit to rule, let alone call himself a wielder sworn to the brotherhood of Wielders who spoke vows and oaths to the gods proclaiming eternal protection to the people and land. This went against every edict passed down from the beginning of time. It went against the very laws of the gods themselves!

Tarnack could not stay in the city, it was killing him and Haddy helped him. Haddy had Deen lead Tarnack's Belle out to the edge of the city and wait and Haddy had to escort Tarnack to the edge of town in a cart he was so unfit to walk.

They waited to see if Tarnack recovered once out of the city, and he did a little, enough so he was no longer dizzy. Once he could mount Belle, he was gone, fleeing the taint of the capitol as fast as Belle's hooves would carry them. Even she seemed disturbed.

"Belle, I don't care what the law says! I will serve the Gods Will first and it's up to wielders and wellsprings to correct this in the end. Now I understand the meaning of bending laws to suit needs. Only this time we bend them for the people! I will not see them suffer! I will NOT!" Tarnack said as he urged Belle faster northwest. He had to talk to his father and call his brothers home.

They needed to form a united front against the crown itself. The people came first, the land second. The king had overstepped his bounds and the heavens themselves were weeping in despair.

Tarnack rode for days on end, resting only long enough for Belle's sake and then he was in the saddle again. He'd encountered on his way one of the reported families fleeing with their three year old male wellspring. Every watch tower was blazing the names of the traitors to the crown. Offering rewards for their capture. They feared Tarnack was in pursuit of them and he just held up his hands. "Never would I harm the innocent. Take the child and run, I saw nothing. Go as far as you can and I pray with my very soul you are successful. I am a non-breeder un-bonded. I too suffer. Get off the main road and avoid the watchtowers and villages I beg you. Take my horse; she is swift and sure of foot. She can carry all three of you. Belle will lend you gods speed." He said and the father openly wept and vowed everlasting gratitude and loyalty to Tarnack, praying for Tarnack to bond quickly to spare the man now forced to live in confinement. Belle was handed over with melancholy joy. It was the right thing to do and Tarnack watched his beloved Belle carry off the wielder and his family and Tarnack turned and continued on foot northwest.

When he reached the village of Yardsfield, he purchased another horse. A sturdy warhorse black stallion in his prime with a white star shape patch on his forehead and white feathered hooves, white mane and tail. Tarnack named him Stardust because when he watched the horse run in the field, his feathered hooves, mane and tail looked like trailing dust behind the star on his forehead. He was a proud animal and a well trained war horse and in these dark times, a good warhorse was going to be needed.

Tarnack had him saddled and he loaded down more provisions into the saddlebags, purposefully planted the story that his last horse had been stolen from him as he rested, just in case they were caught he could not be seen or tied to them. He was King's Own and it should have been his duty to arrest them and not provide a means of escape for traitors. He had to keep up appearances and work subversively if he was going to help the people the way the Gods demanded.

So once his falsehoods were planted and Stardust saddled he was once again back on the road northwest and Stardust devoured the road on his mighty hooves. It was as if he knew the desperation in Tarnack's heart and responded to his master with the equal will and desire to aid him on his journey. It was like the Gods themselves had led Tarnack to Stardust, an ally in his personal rebellion against the crown.

Ten days of pushing and riding until the brink of personal disaster Tarnack was home and he'd sent word on ahead to his father, brothers and trusted peers to meet him. The family homestead was secluded just about ten miles south of Merchant's Row and the storage barn was full of twenty-three bonded pairs and the oil lamps were burning the midnight oil as everyone gathered in horror.

"What do you propose we do Tarnack? We all agree that these laws are a blasphemy against the will of the Gods and suited only to remove Perdain from the line of succession. That much is obvious even to the most ill educated of simpletons. I've even gotten word from my brother in the far south that the tribes down there have closed their borders to all who would recognize this law and denounced the laws in total as a tribal nation and will no longer recognize the crown until the laws are rescinded. All Northern trade is closed indefinitely and They stated that the Dragonheart is the soul of the nation and they will refuse to sequester their male hearts nor support a monarchy who would bleed their own souls dry." The first stated and then another rose.

"I was in Garth when this went down, I saw myself the first boy to willingly surrender himself to spare his parents. fourteen he was, the prime of his youth and all his hopes destroyed of bonding to his wielder. There are only five male wellsprings known other than His Highness Perdain in the Capitol. Three have already surrendered to the crown willingly. One was captured just outside of Waysmeet and the child was only five years old. It seems Pendergar has supporters even amongst our brotherhood. Poor Alistar and Yemani are lost as a pair. Powers sealed and excommunicated and their son was taken to the Temple in Waysmeet and left. Only one is still unaccounted for." Another said and Tarnack smiled.

"And I pray they get away safely. I ran into them on my journey north and gave them Belle to help them ride. They were heading south and if they make the southern borders, it seems the south will be a welcome sanctuary. I pray with my

whole being they succeed. You know those tribes will hide them, I've been there and they hold Honor above everything. The south is the only haven a male wellspring has." Tarnack said and his mother came in with strong coffee and discussions continued.

"Every town Maevryn and I rode through is utter bedlam. Half the population agreeing and supporting Pendergar calling all non-breeders ungodly abominations who purposefully thwart the Gods divine gift of breeding children in favor of flesh lust and the other half appalled and shouting injustice. It's totally divided the people, harmony is disrupted everywhere. Every temple is ringing mourning bells and the monks are trying desperately to calm the people. Reinforcing that non-breeders are not unnatural and also follow the edicts of the heart under the gods, while at the same time trying to reassure those poor lads they will be protected. We have the monks to thank that our male wellsprings are not killed outright. They refused to sanction the initial petition and scared the King enough with condemnation of his soul if he murdered the innocent. The King and lords fear the Gods and divine retribution enough to make the stipulation and allowed the monks to have custody of the male wellsprings."

"Every monk I saw was wearing black mourning bands and saying prayers for deliverance from evil. They did all that they could do on their end it seems. At least our boys will have some comfort in this time of darkness."

"I saw dozens of hate crime victims. Even non-breeder citizens are feeling the injustice and are being brought to task and the monks are having to offer sanctuary to more than just our wellspring boys. In the smaller communities I've gotten reports that so far four innocent men were hung as being anathema. This is affecting more than just our wellsprings; the people are embracing excuses to be cruel. My soul aches and I am at a loss personally on where to go from here."

"It gets worse my friend. Even our own brotherhood is divided. These same simple misguided values have been bred into the wielders who come from these villages. They support Pendergar and will enforce the laws." Tarnack's father said scratching his chin.

"I cannot in good faith and conscience enforce this proclamation. I too fear divine retribution and I swore the oath of brotherhood at fifteen and I remember clearly vowing first to uphold the will of the Gods above all others, second to protect the land and the people from injustice. I do not remember a vow in which I stated I would ignore these primary responsibilities to further a political agenda!" Tarnack said slamming his fist down on the table and others agreed.

"So what do you suggest Tarnack?" His father asked and Tarnack's face grew grave and serious.

“Rebellion. Not overtly mind you, the people do not need bloodshed on top of everything else. No, we work strictly by the vows we made. We cease sending reports to the crown and we report to no one but ourselves. We right the wrongs as we find them and support the edicts of the Gods and cease supporting a corrupt monarchy.”

“Good idea, but how do you suggest we do this and not find ourselves banished as traitors and unable to support the people?”

“We need a way of recognizing friend from foe. Which Wielders and Wellsprings support the Gods Will verses the ones who support the crown. Something we can pass on to our brothers as we find them. A hand gesture, a sign, a ring anything not blatant to one who knows not what he’s looking for.” Tarnack said and his mother stood.

“I have it. We all wear rank insignia patches. Each is a perfect diamond, but if we all simply make a small cut to the top corner it will just look to the naked eye like a mishap with a pair of scissors. Most won’t even notice if the cut is small enough but we will know to look at patches first and anyone not wearing the altered patch is a foe.” She said and Tarnack nodded.

“Brilliant Mom. Simple, understated and you’re right we’re all so used to the patches no one will notice the alterations. Show us please.” Tarnack said and his mother took his father’s vest and carefully pulled out a few of the stitches holding it in place and then neatly nipped off the upper corner, just a hint removed, but enough to show it was not accidental to the ones looking for it. Then she sewed it back in place and everyone else in the room followed suit and altered their patches.

One of Tarnack’s brother’s spoke up. “I have another idea. Rather than cutting all ties to the crown by failing to report which would draw unwanted attention. There’s nothing saying we have to report all our work. We continue to report as we’ve always done, it will keep suspicions from the crown at bay. We report the same mundane things we always do, things that don’t need to be kept secret. Like the crown ever reads those reports we make at deciding who gets the chicken and who owns the egg? No, they don’t. They only care about which rouge node we handled, how many were-beasts we killed, how many storms that blew in from the wasteland. Statistics. We should continue sending those statistics; those DO help the people when the scholars try to predict patterns. What we leave out is who we harbored, who we talked to, who we met, where we slept, what contacts we made. We do not mention each other in our letters, we work independently but we keep our network of information growing within. We need to make two reports, one to the crown and a complete one to a central location within our rebellion itself.” He said and Tarnack’s eyes lit up.

“You’re right Ednar. Out of all of us, only Mom and Dad are resident wielders. Would you be our centralized headquarters dad? Let us send to you information and you in turn can spread it directly to our brotherhood?”

“I think that’s a good idea, and I’ll add my own two cents. Get the temples involved. They have their own network themselves. They have that bell code that not even the crown has the means of deciphering because it’s secret and I only know this because I had a dear childhood friend who took his calling to the temple. He was like a little brother to me and about as honest and godly spiritual as you can get. He told me about the bell code years ago when we were getting piss ass drunk as skunks on wine one night before I bonded to your mother and before he left our small village temple to go to the city to teach. His name is Rembrooke and he’s in the capitol temple and I keep in touch with him regularly. He’s the monk in charge of the Prince himself and a non-breeder himself. If anyone is on your side it’s Rembrooke. He loves Perdain like his own son and I know he’s probably beside himself with fear for him. If you want godly allies, you go to the monks. Expand your network through Rembrooke and the temples will spread the word to Wielders and Wellsprings on our side to alter their patches. Working with the Temples we will at least return stability to the land. That needs to come first. We can’t work in chaos. Get the people calm and then work at undermining the monarchy from the inside.”

“Dad you’re brilliant! Is everyone in favor?” Tarnack said and a resounding “AYE” was shouted. They had some hope now and a direction to follow. It was starting small, but it was a unified direction at the very least.

“Then I’ll go and write Rembrooke. I’ll get whatever information he has and pass it on to all of you. I’ll have him filter the word to the other temples of the Rebellion Brotherhood. They’ll instruct others how to join our ranks and then I’ll have Rembrooke pass me the names of all those we count as friend and foe. We’ll need to work in secret and one of us will have to keep the Crown’s eye off what we are doing. Keep them distracted and busy.” Ednack said and Tarnack smiled.

“Leave that to me Dad. I’m the perfect choice. They took away my hopes of finding my mate, they cursed me as a non-breeder I’m the natural candidate to be seen making noise in opposition. I can fuel righteous indignation because I am rather indignant at the moment. Let me be the pawn and token figurehead. I will work openly our agenda and draw supporters and stir controversy because not only do I oppose the law openly, I do so as Kings Own. They will rue the day they gave me this title, I plan on throwing it back in their faces and spitting on it. They recognized me for honor and integrity and if I oppose the very hand that claimed me honorable it will open eyes.”

“Dangerous son, you’ll be labeled a traitor.”

“Oh Aye and I’m counting on it. Let them try and stop me, I will not go quietly.” Tarnack said and with that the meeting was called to an end for the night.

Rembrooke rushed into Perdain’s room in the middle of the night and woke him. “Son wake up I have wonderful news.” He said and Perdain sat up rubbing sleepy eyes.

“What is it my Father?” He asked and Rembrooke smiled at the phrase. Perdain had taken to adding the ‘my’ to his honorarium. Indicating he considered Rembrooke more than his spiritual advisor, but a father in heart.

“A very old friend of mine just wrote to me. When I was young and living up in the northwest, I lived in a small village and my dearest of friends was a boy about six years my elder. Ednack was a wielder and like an older brother to me. He encouraged me to follow my calling to the temple and supported my decisions and helped me become what I am today. We have never lost touch and he writes me tonight with shocking news. There is a Rebellion forming. The brotherhood of Wielders is dividing as we speak. Ednack’s son is leading the Rebellion, Kings Own Tarnack no less! I had no idea he was Ednack’s son. The lad just earned his distinctions and is already casting them aside in favor of following the vows and not the crown. He has publicly denounced his titles in a statement saying his honor and integrity is insulted and he would no more serve a corrupt crown than he would claim himself a god. Both to him are blasphemous. He stated in formal letter to the King and Council that his vows were taken first under the Gods and second to the People and Lands and at no time did his vows state he was to forgo his pledge in favor of politics and service to a corrupt monarchy. He’s labeled himself a voluntary traitor to the crown and supporter of the God’s Edict and People. He’s an outlaw and calling for people to follow him.”

“What? That is madness!” Perdain said and Rembrooke shook his head.

“No son, it’s a man standing up for justice as a token figurehead and willing sacrifice to further the Rebellion’s ends. There is more. There are Twenty bonded pairs already formed, Ednack is the Rebellion’s secret headquarter master. All report to him their work and he spreads the word through the network. Tarnack is a diversion, he keeps the Crown’s eye focused on him, and he draws attention away from the others. He’s the perfect man to do so. Not only is he Kings Own for his honor and integrity but the same man who gave him this distinction also cursed him to forever remain an un-bonded Wielder. Tarnack is the youngest man ever to receive a King’s Own distinction un-bonded and he is a non-breeder and his mate is now sealed from him. The King honors him and curses him on the same day. He embodies the injustice on the other side of this issue. He is the Wielder who suffers beside the wellspring. He is their vocal champion unafraid to voice his outrage on their behalf when they have no one. The longer he can

shout injustice, the more will hear him and come. The temples have been asked to join in the rebellion, to watch for Wielders and Wellsprings who would follow the vows they took over the crown. They plan to work subversively, undermining the corruption by working out in the field directly with and for the people. They plan only on reporting vital statistics to the crown while in the same breath, stopping prejudice and hatred in their tracks by getting in with the people and reinforcing the temple's stance on the Edict of Equality in Love under the Gods. Reminding the people hands on that it is by the Gods Will we live and the Gods Will we die. When a Monarchy betrays the people it swore to the Gods to protect, it betrays the very Gods themselves."

"This is very true my Father. However, will this also not just continue to contribute to the discordance in our land? I fail to see what good this will do."

"You said yourself my Son, this discordance comes because the people are in chaos and feeding the land disorganized fear. This will give direction to those lost, a point and a person to focus on. Most people need to put their faith in people who share their beliefs. Not everyone can lead their own destinies and you know this. Most folk are like sheep and will blindly follow others. There are precious few men who have the courage to stand apart to follow their hearts. Those who lead others by example and merit. Tarnack is one of those men."

Perdain smiled. "You are wise as ever my father. You are right. He will give the people a voice of hope. While our people will still inevitably divide and choose either Tarnack or my Father they will chose and become organized again and the land will calm. Which I am sure is Tarnack's intention. He does indeed follow his Vows and deserves his Kings Own distinction. I pray he finds his wellspring, a man like him deserves some happiness in these dark times we face." Perdain said Rembrooke smiled.

"Shall I send a bell code response the Temples have joined the rebellion?"

"Aye. Please also send a personal message to Tarnack and his father. Whatever I can do with my limited capabilities I will aide them in their quest." Perdain said and Rembrooke nodded and went to code a message that would spread from temple to temple across the land indicating the call to a unified front against injustice and blasphemy against the Gods Will.

Tarnack was camped in an old abandoned Hay shed, Stardust hidden inside with him as they rested. He was a wanted man and if he avoided the power signatures of other wielders in the area and kept himself shielded he could go from temple to temple in secret and meet with those men and women who chose to follow the Rebellion. He was just outside of Traverspool when a letter came from his father. It appeared next to him as he sat over his fire brewing coffee.

Dear Tarnack,

Good news, Rembrooke has sent confirmation that all the temples are unified and all are safe haven sanctuaries for you to shelter in on your journey. Prince Perdain has sent to me via a personal messenger monk all the temples locations on the map I've enclosed. He's marked on them the safest back roads to take and he also indicated several secret way stations the monks use as resting points between temples. They've hidden these places all over Holst as emergency shelters that they keep stocked and secured from Bandits and Thieves. The Temples have indicated you should use them to hide in when required and they have all been or will be freshly stocked for you and your horse.

Perdain is ever at work in the Temple archives for you night and day. Researching Edicts and histories to try and uncover anything that will counter the Laws and lend our cause credence based in law and scripture. I sent the letter Perdain sent me, I find myself in awe and unable to believe he is only coming up on fourteen years old. He speaks with more wisdom than most grown men I've met in my lifetime. How Pendergar denounced this boy at all is baffling to me, any man would be Proud to call this lad their son.

Safe Journey on you my Son.

*Love,
Dad*

Tarnack set aside his father's letter and unfolded the detailed map with concise footnotes recently added in a neat and clean script. The letter with the map in the same precise handwriting.

Dear Wielder Ednack,

I hope my letter reaches you safely. Father Rembrooke and I have been working around the clock to gather you all we can in aide. Enclosed with this letter I have sent our Temple Map. I've indicated the best routes to and from each location that will have the least possibility of Wielder Tarnack facing opposition on the open road. Most of these byways are hidden at first, the entrance to these roads often obscured from plain sight. Always look for the small stone god statues; they will always be placed on either side of the entrance to the path.

These are the ancient roads formed long ago during the religious persecution of monks and the faithful during King Wissen's time. Before the King was required to be a wielder. These safe havens have remained and have been kept in place for times such as these. It is sorrow that fills my heart that they need to be used again, but also joy to be found knowing they will aide Tarnack in his brave journey.

Along these paths are way stations and sanctuaries I beg you to use for Tarnack's safety. The monks are all making sure to check on these points to make sure they are stocked for his use with fresh food, medical supplies and feed for his horse. They will also leave in these locations names of contacts he can use along the way. Commoner supporters and trusted deacons to the brotherhood of the faith who will hide him and shelter him as a fugitive should he be caught between way stations.

The Temple wishes to share another secret with you, the brotherhood of the faith is the society that has stood as protection over the pathways and way stations since the time of King Wissen. These men will stock the stations and clear the paths for you. Their homes are built over underground temples. You have heard I am sure of the times when the people during King Wissen's time were forced to worship the Gods in secret and these temples are hidden all over Holst. They are open to you Tarnack whenever you have need of them.

If you are not within safe distance to a way station you will be close to one of these temples. I have marked them all on the map for you and indicated the name of the man who guards the secret and holds the key to them.

I continue to research the laws and scriptures, trying to find anything that will stand against the new laws. So far sadly I have had little success. Most of our Wielder and Wellspring Laws lie in vague Edicts. Our vows are really all we have as protection and come from these Edicts. I can find nothing that will free the other male wellsprings but I will not cease trying.

Lastly, before I send this letter to you, I impart a personal secret of my own. One only my mothers knows and Father turns blind eyes too. Fenderack as you know has spent many years trying to murder me, but in his attempts to force my wellspring open to taint he has only served to make my well larger. Burning it repeatedly wide open and with each attempt, like digging a hole he makes it deeper. I have a far reaching range, well beyond most wellsprings and I am slowly, as to not raise suspicion, siphoning off power from the city nodes into the ley lines that lead to the country. I will strengthen the land as much as I can for you to use Tarnack.

The less power Fenderack has to utilize the safer we all are. I write with dire insights to the real Fenderack, beware him and fear him. I make this statement not lightly, he is dangerous and I can tell you with confidence and sorrow I know my Father's days are numbered on the throne. Fenderack even now plots to kill him now that he is heir. I am his twin and I have ever felt what others do not, I have seen and have been victim to his rouge nature. He is not a wielder, he is a demon, a were-human, he thrives on taint like a were beast. His bloodlust is feral, his very soul black to the touch like a rogue node. No one is safe if he takes the throne. He has already said to me on several occasions as he rips my

power from me my death will be slow and painful, he will use me until I become a mindless human rouge node for him to use at his will. If that happens and I cannot withstand him and break, I have already placed orders on Rembrooke he is to kill me and cut off the power to Fenderack. If Rembrooke or the other monks are unable to carry out this duty, I beg the Rebellion Brotherhood to kill me at all costs for the good of Holst and to free my soul from this tainted body.

Until this time inevitably comes, I will ever be a loyal servant to the Rebellion. Gods speed to my brothers and the Gods Grace upon you Tarnack, long may you be a beacon of hope to the people.

*Devoted in Heart,
Perdain.*

Tarnack set the letter down and his hands were shaking. Perdain's words went straight to his heart and gripped it in icy fear. This was no boy, this was a man trapped in a boy's body. He had more courage and love for the people in his heart than any man or woman Tarnack had ever met, including himself.

He spoke gravely and with a staggering intelligence. His notes, his insights, his theories, everything he thought might be of even remote importance he sent to aide them. He'd even gone so far as to indicate which temples now held male wellsprings and he begged that all non-breeders should visit this temples and try bonding to rescue the boys.

The only temple he failed to mark, was the capitol, he had already taken himself out of the equation. Resigned to a different fate, working toward a different goal and this plainly demonstrated he thought nothing of himself; all his energy was being expended for others. The people, the land, the rebellion and Tarnack.

"By the Gods Grace, I would follow you to the ends of the earth and back again Perdain just to serve you and protect you. You are my King, you are the noblest of them all." Tarnack said folding Perdain's letter and tucking it in his breast pocket. This letter he would not burn unless forced to for safety. This was written by the hand of Perdain himself and carried his spirit. Tarnack would use it as a beacon of hope for himself when times grew darker still. He carried Perdain with him on his journey and it would remind him that Perdain deserved his best efforts and if it took a lifetime, Tarnack would try to rescue him too.

Tarnack ate quickly and then picked up a piece of parchment and quill and began writing a personal letter.

Your Highness, Prince Perdain,

My father has forwarded me your letter and my heart still races with the impact of your words and their effects upon me. None of us knew just how drastically

corrupt the situation really is and I vow to you I will not rest until I see this journey through. I take another vow, here and now before the Gods themselves that in addition to my Vows to Serve the Gods Will and to protect the land and the People. I vow to honor and serve you until my dying breath. I will do whatever is in my power to protect you and keep you safe. Enclosed with my letter is my ring. I have placed on it a shield that should provide you at least some meager protection against your brother. It should buffer his attempts to rape your well.

I beg you, from the very bottom of my heart, to ever wear it your highness until I can come for you personally and get you out of his reach. I will not leave you there to suffer in silence alone and unprotected. I refuse to sit and watch such a Gods Touched and Blessed Soul die. You humble me. You make me wish to emulate your conviction and your faith. With your noble heart and example to follow as my guide I know the path I have chosen to walk is the right one. You have shed such brilliant light upon my soul and have restored my hope.

I will ever be your most devoted servant. Long Live the Prince of the People!

*Eternally yours,
Tarnack*

Tarnack folded the letter around this ring and willed his letter to the Temple and to the hands of the man who had written the letter in his pocket.

Perdain jumped when a letter suddenly appeared in his lap and on top of his hands that had been folded in his lap in silent prayer.

He opened the letter and read and his heart beat wildly in his chest. He had not expected a personal letter to be sent to him from Tarnack, let alone one that read as this one did. Never had anyone other than Rembrooke called him these things and no one had ever pledged such undying loyalty and protection.

Perdain's finger's shook as he looked at the ring. A simple silver band that had been etched with the ancient runes from old texts. This ring was just as ancient, probably passed down from father to son for hundreds of generations. The runes were the ancient symbols of life, honor, valor, faith, loyalty, justice, wisdom, and peace. The code that all Wielders and Wellsprings lived by and vowed to protect.

The ring itself carrying traces of power from all those who had worn it before Tarnack and Perdain could feel the power of the barrier around it and as he slipped the ring on his left ring finger, it was far too large, but only for a moment. Perdain almost tumbled out of his chair in shock as the ring shimmered and then adjusted itself to fit Perdain's hand.

"A gods ring!" Perdain gasped. These were only legendary and Perdain thought them fanciful tales in ancient scrolls. Only eight of these rings were told to have

been created and given to the very first bonded pairs by the gods themselves long before Holst was a kingdom and was a disorganized chaotic tribal war zone. The eight chosen pairs were said to embody all the virtues the Gods Edict held highest and they were given these rings and granted their wielder and wellspring gifts and sent out to tame Holst and unify the land.

Up until that moment Perdain had only believed them fables. Now he truly believed, on his hand was a god wrought silver ring and given to him by a Wielder who already possessed those virtues in abundance.

Perdain felt warm from his head to his toes and his heart raced in his chest. There wasn't anything in all of Holst that would stop Perdain from laying down his life to aide Tarnack. If he'd held any fears or reservations they died in that instant. He truly believed the Gods had chosen Tarnack as their messenger and if it took Perdain's last breath he would honor and serve him in return.

For the first time in his Life, Perdain also now held hope. Tarnack had restored his own faith and had given him new energy to fight and stand strong and not take his fate lying down meekly.

Perdain read the letter over and over, his fingers tracing Tarnack's signature. What did the hands of the man that wrote this letter look like? What was Tarnack like? How old was he? Was he healthy and was he safe? Perdain's mind raced with questions as Rembrooke came in.

Perdain showed Rembrooke the letter first and then the ring and Rembrooke was as much in shock as Perdain had been.

"What is he like Rembrooke?" Perdain asked and for the first time in his life Perdain was displaying almost dreamlike curiosity and the look in his young eyes spoke volumes.

Rembrooke smiled. "Saw him only once and only briefly. We didn't actually meet face to face. Had I known then he was Ednack's son I would have gone over to him. I was over at the Cock-n-Bull and I was watching him admire your painting there. He's young, probably twenty or twenty-one no more and a tall lad. Handsome in that typically northern way. You have seen men from the northeast. They grow them fairly big up there; they have to be sturdy lads to handle the environment. He's not overly big like most, you can tell he's used to hard riding on horses, he's built like a cavalry soldier is. Lean and long. Why suddenly so interested?"

"Nothing really, just curious. I'd like to picture the face is all to go with the soul I admire."

“Little fibber. I know a dreamy look in one’s eyes when I see it Perdain. You’re smitten.” Rembrooke said and Perdain blushed but smiled.

“Aye, a little of that too. I confess. He intrigues me.”

“Well then I shall send you to bed with more nice thoughts than my son. He is nearly blond and just shy of brown haired, his eyes are like a cat’s green one moment and gold the next. Let us just hope he can sneak about like a cat shall we?” Rembrooke winked and Perdain smiled.

“Aye, he will ever be in my prayers for safety and blessing’s. Goodnight my father.”

“Goodnight Perdain, dream well.” He said leaving and he smiled as he returned to his rooms. At last Perdain was showing signs of desire and that he was no longer a child. Rembrooke said his own prayers that night. He couldn’t think of a better bonded pair than Tarnack and Perdain. The wonders they could accomplish together would unite the people.

Rembrooke only hoped it wasn’t just infatuation over a nice letter and astounding gift. Tarnack was much older than Perdain at least seven years if not a little more or less. That was a rather large gap for one so young as Perdain, not yet even fourteen.

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Act III - The Rise of King Fenderack

For over two years Tarnack moved in secrecy, following the ancient roads and holding secret meetings in hidden temples gaining support for the Rebellion. Everywhere Tarnack went, the people were divided and torn. Prejudice ran rampant, fear held sway and more and more proclamations fell from the council destroying the fabric of these people’s lives. Now all wellsprings, male or female fell victim to politic design. Any titles, lands or monies the wellspring possessed were forfeit to the crown if she bonded to a Wielder. She became the sole property of her wielder with no rights to her rank, wealth or station after her bonding. This applied to any wellsprings currently bonded too, including the queen.

Her own lands she’d had before she bonded to Pendergar were liquidated and went into the crown’s coffers. Her family jewels, treasured heirlooms and items she’d had in her family for generations sold for a profit to fuel the crown treasury.

Ladies of standing and wealth whose devoted loving Wielders had once been farmers or tradesmen forced to leave her estates, whole families turned out penniless and her assets seized. These men and women turned out to the streets and wandering aimlessly, some with young families. All of them sheltered by the temples or members of the Rebellion to help them get back on their feet.

During these years Tarnack kept in constant contact with Perdain, letter after letter he would send to Perdain to tell him of progress, to warn him of trouble to ask advice on a situation or simply just a note from a tired and weary man sharing his feelings.

Perdain would always reply and a Rebellion wielder living in the city as a spy would meet Rembrooke at the Cock-n-Bull and forward Perdain’s letter to Tarnack.

Tarnack was just about to fall asleep, it was well past sunrise and dangerous by the time he made his current way station. He had almost missed the God stone marker in the overgrowth of the forest road and then he’d had to search around for the hidden latch that would reveal the door to the building camouflaged to blend in with the land.

Stardust was already sleeping; his belly full of warm mash and the late autumn day very cold but the fire inside was welcome for heat. Tarnack was exhausted and was just about to drift to sleep when a letter materialized beside him and sudden renewed energy lifted his spirits as he ripped open the letter from Perdain.

Dearest Tarnack,

I am distressed to hear of the troubles you've been having. It pains me to know how hard you try and how little rest you are getting and having to deliver more troubling news to your already overly burdened shoulders cuts me to the quick.

Seven more Wellsprings have had their lands seized and I've included a list of their names and locations for you. The manhunt for you is still strong and the monies they take from these families go to pay mercenaries to hunt you down.

The bounty on your head is now up to three hundred thousand dead or alive. I shiver inside with fear that your days grow shorter as more good men fall to greed to stop your Gods Work.

As you know, Fenderack is now a fully ranked Wielder, gaining his title rank based on age alone. Fifteen last winter and gifted his rank rather than made to take the exams and vows. They have all but turned their backs on the edicts now. Fenderack has made no vows to the gods and serves only himself.

The madness consumes Pernath, every node in the city on the brink of going rogue and I work night and day to try to purge the taint. I am failing and I want to weep with frustration that I am unable to do more.

It has been months since Fenderack has tried to grasp my well, he is preoccupied with matters I have yet to uncover through our network of spies in the city. Haddy and Deen report no news from their allies in the taverns and the merchant vendors notice only a lull in most trade with a boom in weapons and steel. The army and mercenary guilds are all over the city patrolling.

The most startling information is Fenderack is the one increasing the size of the army and several squadrons have appeared patrolling streets at night enforcing city wide curfews. Anyone out after midnight and discovered by Fenderack's night patrol are arrested or fined. Usually both.

People are being bled dry and where all the money is going I still do not know. Tarnack I am afraid, I sense even worse things to come. I can no longer telepathically reach my mother; they suspect and have her confined to her rooms under heavy shield I dare not try to circumvent lest I alert them to my own agenda.

The pulse in the city is like a heart beat growing steadily slower and when that stillness reaches it's end I fear an explosion that will rock Holst to all it's borders.

I pray when that time comes you are safe my dearest Tarnack. Every night I say a prayer for your safe deliverance and success. The work you do brings light to the darkness for so many, including me. All my hopes rest with you.

Your letters bring me comfort, your ring never leaves my finger and when I am most filled with sorrow, I have but to feel it on my hand to know you are out there still and I am filled with hope again.

By the Gods Grace, I hope I have the strength to continue to fight this battle along side you and whether you and I ever meet one day or times conspire to keep me separate and confined, it matters not. I am sure I would recognize the soul long before I recognized the man. A soul I am blessed to already know so dearly. You must shine so brightly.

*Ever your Devoted,
Perdain*

Tarnack held the letter to his heart and kissed the paper in his hand.

“I need not to touch your well to know I love you Perdain. Bonded or not, you hold my soul in your hands. Loved you I have from the first letter I ever read and love you more with every letter you send.” Tarnack said picking up a quill to respond at once.

My Beloved Prince,

I received your letter and your lists. I had heard there were more to lose their lands but not who, your list will aid me in tracking them down and bringing them into the Rebellion for protection. There is little else we can do at the moment our progress is slow but at least steady. With the coming of winter and cold weather and the end of the harvests my progress even slower. Winter travel is hard and there is less forest to hide in when the leaves are gone and the snow freezing both Stardust and I to the bone.

Like last Winter, when travel became too difficult to maintain I plan to take shelter in one of the hidden temples again. Those are still secret and vastly secure and much needed rest I gain.

They give me what I need to gain strength again and the only thing that could make them even better food for my soul would be to have you there with me. How I would love just an evening to sit with you and talk. To hear your voice that I can only imagine when I read your letters and to see the hands who write them. To see your face and carry with me your image as I carry your letters to feed my soul.

Wistful dreams from a tired man I know. Nevertheless, I have them just the same. It drives me and pushes me forward, because I know in my heart everyday brings me one day closer to finding a way to get to you.

Get to you I will. I have a need and a hunger that will not be satisfied until I know you are forever safe.

I live to serve you and if I shine dearest Perdain, I shine because the love you give us all so freely gives me the strength to fight on.

*Forever Yours,
Tarnack.*

Perdain laid the letter beside him on his table as he turned to his mirror to comb out his long dark hair, a wistful smile on his lips as he absently brushed and his fingers moved automatically to braid his hair for bed. For well over two years Tarnack had been the love of his young life.

Every letter he was sent read until Perdain could quote the words, he could see Tarnack's handwriting in his sleep, he would dream of a faceless tall stranger with the lightest brown and blond hair and see green eyes like a cat's watching over him from the shadows.

Phantom hands would hold him close and every morning he'd awake to the ring on his finger glowing warm and comforting on his hand. He ached with a melancholy sadness, born of nothing more than a personal desire to hold Tarnack in his arms and comfort him on those cold nights he spent alone with only Stardust for company.

Since Tarnack's first letter, he'd sparked in Perdain a love unlike he'd ever known. His body would betray him and yearn to be touched by the man who penned such devotion. He longed to show Tarnack his truest of hearts and whether it was a bond or not, the love was very real and he'd give his body to Tarnack as he had already given him his young heart and very soul.

Perdain sighed and carefully tucked away Tarnack's letter with the others he kept hidden under a loose stone under his bed. He didn't have the will to part with them just yet, those words fueled his hopes and dreams and he'd read them over and over when times were darkest.

Perdain snuffed out his candle and crawled into bed and shut his eyes and welcomed with open arms the sweetest of dreams.

Perdain awoke abruptly, the city was on fire and people were screaming in terror. The night patrol was butchering men and women and Rembrooke burst into Perdain's rooms.

"Now! Perdain we leave now! Fenderack has murdered Pendergar and your mother. He has seized control and disbanded the council. It's a matter of moments before he is here for you!" Rembrooke said and Perdain was out of bed, grabbing Tarnack's letters because those could not be found and with a heavy heart he tossed them into the fire and made sure they burned completely before being thrown under a cloak and pulled down the corridors of the temple and down into the catacombs that ran under the city.

There a wielder and his wellspring waited, wearing the altered patch of the rebellion. "Take him down the paths until they end. They will come out to the sewers. Follow them until you can go no farther. They end at the river, go east and stay in the water to cover your tracks. I will go to Haddy, Wren and Deen and we'll make our own way out with Wielder Pavel and Wellspring Mundy. Head to Garth and the hidden temple under the mountain there. Pavel sent an alert to Tarnack; he'll meet up with you and escort the Prince to Garth ahead of you. Gods speed my Son!" Rembrooke said and with a brief hug, Perdain parted with Yancy and Caery under heavy shield and they ran. He was cold, dressed in only his nightshirt and shoeless with only a cloak for warmth but he would ignore the cold stone and filthy sewer, their most desperate hour had come.

Tarnack's heart stopped as he read the frantic letter from Pavel indicating Fenderack had seized the throne and the city was burning. Yancy and Caery were escorting Perdain out of the catacombs of the city and down the White Rush river towards Garth. Tarnack was to make haste to intercept them and carry Perdain faster than he could travel on foot.

"Stardust we RIDE! Wind to the hooves my friend! Perdain's life is forfeit if we fail!" Tarnack said digging in his heels and Stardust's hooves devoured the landscape. His head was down and his breath frosty in the ice cold air. Tarnack's face was stinging from cold and wind as they raced in the darkness down the paths toward the capitol and White rush river.

Perdain was shivering uncontrollably and soaked to the bone from the rushing frigid water. His teeth were chattering loudly as they moved as quickly as possible. The city was ablaze behind them and the sounds of shouting and horses were all around them. People fleeing the city and being cut down by soldiers under Fenderack's banner in the distance. None of them following the river, it was too dangerous in these few weeks before winter, which gave them the cover they needed to flee themselves.

Loud hooves were coming closer and splashing in the water before them and they all froze in fear when a black war stallion foaming at the mouth, his breath

puffing white in the cold and sweating from a hard ride pulled up to a halt. The white star on his forehead and his white mane catching the moonlight and a dark cloaked figure loomed into view, obscured by the hood of his cloak, a white hand reaching out. "Perdain! With me! Hurry, they are everywhere dearest!"

A rich baritone called out frantically and Perdain's hand was grasped and he was thrown up onto the tall steed in front of Tarnack and the horse reared as he pivoted. "Safe journey my friends! We will meet in Garth! Follow the river!" Tarnack said, his arm holding Perdain tightly and bringing his own cloak around Perdain for warmth the horse was on the fly again. Perdain was frozen, his whole body quaking with cold and a warm hand wrapped around him and held him close against Tarnack's chest as the other held the reigns of Stardust.

::Too long a journey for one night Perdain. We'll get you rested and warm in one of the way stations tonight, you're soaked to the bone and shaking terribly.:: Tarnack said and the same warm baritone was his in mind.

::No time to wait. Happened so fast, even if I'd had time to dress, no good once in that river.:: Perdain replied and he felt Tarnack's hand on his belly flex and then pull him even closer.

::I know, just hold on dearest. It's not far now.:: Tarnack sent and Perdain's trembling hand came to rest atop Tarnack's, it was ice cold and Tarnack just moved his hand on top of it and squeezed tightly, giving his warmth to Perdain as they rode like the wind.

They stopped as abruptly as they'd ridden and Tarnack slid off Stardust's back and literally pulled Perdain into his strong arms and carried him into the way station. Stardust following.

Tarnack set Perdain on the bed and ripped the soaked cloak and nightshirt off him and threw a blanket around him while rubbing life into frozen limbs and feet. "Can you feel your toes and fingers dearest?" Tarnack asked as he drank in his first sight of the youth he loved.

His skin was pale and his poor lips were blue with cold but his face, his glorious beautiful face was like looking at the heavens themselves. He'd never dreamed Perdain was so incredibly beautiful. His long braid of darkest sable was wet and coming undone and he looked windblown and scared but when his eyes turned up to meet Tarnack's and he smiled even though his lips were quivering Tarnack was irrevocably lost.

"I am not frost bitten no. Fear not dear Tarnack. At last we meet." Perdain said and his soft understated breathy tenor was like waves kissing sandy shores and Tarnack shivered not from cold, but from utter desire.

“Aye, and before I lose myself completely to you, let me get the fire started and Stardust taken care of. Rest there a moment dearest, I need to make sure we are sealed in here under barriers I do not want them to trace your whereabouts or mine.” Tarnack said running the backs of his fingers against Perdain’s cheekbone and smiling sincerely before he got up and first secured them inside and lighting a fire and taking Stardust to the Pen and making sure he was warm and taken care of and his muscles massaged and brushed so he didn’t suffer the long ride. Once Stardust was tended and his nose in a bag of oats, Tarnack returned to Perdain’s side.

He had stopped shivering and was curled up on the bed, silently watching Tarnack work. His eyes filled with unguarded affection and as Tarnack sat beside him he rolled to his back and smiled up at the most handsome young man he’d ever seen.

“I don’t need to bond to you to know I love you.” Perdain said and Tarnack’s joy at those words manifested in a brilliant smile.

“Aye. Loved you I have from your very first letter to me. I know even before I touch your well, we will bond. I feel it in my very soul.” Tarnack said leaning over and laying his lips against the almost sixteen year old youth’s lips lying in the bed.

Perdain’s slender and naked arms came up around Tarnack’s shoulders as he surrendered willingly to the kiss. His well open in invitation and Tarnack reached out and touched heaven. He had long known in his heart this would happen and the bonding was immediate. Two halves of a whole blended and merged and became a united pairing.

Their lips were gasping for breath now as the bonding quickened their hearts and Tarnack’s strong hands smoothed away the blanket to expose Perdain in their bed.

His pale flesh flushed pink with sudden desire; his slender form like a reed lay exposed and unafraid. His swelling of desire laying against his taut belly and flushed a deeper red. Tarnack devoured Perdain with his eyes. So young, so beautiful, so very real and his alone.

“I cannot describe my joy at this moment beloved. So very beautiful you are to me.” Tarnack breathed and Perdain just smiled.

“Then show me your feelings dearest.” Perdain replied and Tarnack stood and shed his clothes and returned to lay atop Perdain, his lips crushing in his kiss, his hands roaming sensitive flesh, stroking Perdain’s desire until the youth was mewling and gasping beneath him.

Tarnack was awash in the glow and power that was his heart's meaning. His reason for living, the keeper of his soul. For years he had loved this youth like none other before. He was the driving force behind his will, the hope that filled Tarnack's breast. There was nothing about this young man Tarnack did not worship with every fiber of his being.

Perdain as offering himself as a willing sacrifice to his wielder, his soul was laid bare, his wellspring blazing with power and bathing Tarnack in light and his body in the flesh offered without reservation. Theirs was a bond already formed and long solidified in genuine love, this was now just the consummation of their bond, the physical manifestation of the love that was already long established.

Perdain's arms clung to Tarnack's shoulders, his lips kissed whatever part of Tarnack he could reach and his legs were spread wide on either side of Tarnack's larger body. His feet coming up around Tarnack's hips in blatant invitation and offering.

Tarnack had nothing to use to ease their joining other than his saliva which he worked with fingers that pulled and stretched and coating his own engorged manhood he closed his eyes and pushed.

Perdain arched into the invasion with a moan, his hands gripping Tarnack's shoulders. His wellspring on fire and blazing like a million stars at once. Tarnack was blinded by the surge in power and thrust repeatedly into his lover, his wellspring and his beloved husband.

Perdain's name was sobbed as Tarnack loved him like a man possessed. Tasting the power and drinking deeply, fueling his long strained stores and rejuvenating. He was a dozen times stronger than he'd ever been. His wellspring was the most remarkable power source he'd ever touched in his life. It was pure and untainted and a white hot node of power. He would never cease desiring to sup from this glorious oasis of never ending light.

Perdain was sobbing Tarnack's name, his back arched and his head thrown back and utterly lost in his own desires. He needed to feel this man in him and around him like a thick shield of protection. He needed to taste the pure power their lovemaking created in the room, he had to have this man's love fill him, this man's strength willingly overpower him and he had to give this man everything he was. His heart, his soul, his power and his body. Everything forfeited and entrusted to Tarnack's keeping. He wanted to be owned, protected, loved and fulfilled. He wanted to live his life bound to this man night and day for as long as they lived. He wanted to support and comfort and give everything he possessed to Tarnack for all eternity and it began years ago when he had given Tarnack his heart and soul and now his body was given and laid upon the altar in sacrifice to his wielder.

Tarnack's acceptance of his offering was blinding and blissful. He felt alive and every pore was exploding with power and going straight into his wielder.

Release came for them both within moments of each other and they lay together entwined for many minutes just regaining their lost breath and a slowing of their hearts again.

Tarnack propped himself up on his elbow and leaned over to drink in another kiss and smoothing Perdain's messy locks away from his flushed and glowing face. "Now that I have you beloved, no one will take you from me. Had I known all those years ago when I left the city that you were mine, I would have taken you with me." Tarnack said and Perdain only smiled.

"You could not have known Dearest. I could not have known. Besides I had to catch up to you a little in age first. I was only thirteen when you left and am still two months from sixteen now. I must seem still a child to you." Perdain said and Tarnack shook his head.

"You have never seemed a child to me beloved. Perhaps it was because it was your wisdom I saw of you first. Your words have ever been vastly more mature than your years. I saw not a child in your letters, but my superior. To me you are ageless. Thirteen, sixteen, one hundred it matters not to me. It is your soul I have always loved most." Tarnack said and Perdain's arms reached up and pulled Tarnack closer for a kiss that curled his toes.

"As your soul showed me what love means Tarnack. From your first letter I was lost to you. I will ever stand with you, no matter where we go from here." Perdain said and Tarnack openly wept and crushed Perdain in his arms. Clinging to his joy for all he was worth, curling around Perdain's body like a physical shield to protect him. He would never let this beautiful soul go until he expired from this earth.

When they actually fell asleep, neither remembered and it was mid-day before either of them stirred. Tarnack was used to traveling at night and hiding during the daylight so he was not in a hurry to be moving again.

Right now he was concerned only over looking at the youth sleeping beside him. He really had not expected Perdain to be so beautiful. Both Pendergar and Fenderack had been rather brutish and blunt faced men. Perdain looked like Gergaine, he had her delicacy, her warmth, her dark hair and grey blue eyes and her fairest toned skin.

Like mother like son they had bonded to men far their elders and like Gergaine had said to him once the years had never been an obstacle when the love was

pure and she was right. Perdain shivered slightly and Tarnack pulled the covers up closer under his chin and carefully got out of bed to stoke the fire. He checked on Stardust and he was resting peacefully and comfortably and Tarnack went to the supplies in the station and began brewing coffee and fixing Perdain something to eat. The youth was more than skinny like most wellsprings and Tarnack was fairly positive he was going to be as hungry as Tarnack was when he awoke.

Tarnack was flipping bacon in a pan over the fire when Perdain sat up and stretched almost feline in grace. His slender legs and bare feet poking out of the blanket as he rested them on the floor and wrapped in the blanket for warmth he padded over to Tarnack on silent feet and his smile was bright as the sun as he knelt beside Tarnack by the fire and kissed him good day.

“Good morning. It smells wonderful in here.”

“Aye it does beloved. Just get comfortable, breakfast is almost ready and there is coffee there on the table if you like it.”

“I do. Thank you.” Perdain said pouring a mug and finding the pot of sugar on the table added only just enough to take the edge off the bitter before he drank deeply. He even took his coffee the same way as Tarnack liked it. Proof again of their evident compatibility.

Tarnack brought over the bacon and dished it up before using the same pan and bacon drippings to scramble a good half dozen eggs. Those were done in moments and those too got dished up before Tarnack settled at the table with Perdain.

“There are some spare clothes over in the trunk over there. Most of them probably far too large for you dearest but better than your night shirt.” Tarnack said with a wink and Perdain smiled.

“And vastly warmer. If there is rope to hold up my trousers than I shant worry much. Are there any boots or shoes? Even socks will be better than my bare feet.” Perdain asked and Tarnack nodded.

“Aye, half a dozen old pairs, one will fit good enough. There are some monks robes in there also which are wool and warm, I’d add that too on top for warmth. You are thin and feel the cold more than I do.”

“Aye. I’m always cold, even in summer at times. I can eat and eat and I never gain weight. My well is so large it burns up everything I take in. Perhaps out of the city I will have some time to put on some weight without the strain of the nodes in the city always on me.”

“Probably. What happened? I only got the barest of warnings to come for you immediately.”

“I don’t know myself for once. It all happened in the blink of an eye. I’ve been noticing at night from watching from the bell tower. Several new regiments of men were patrolling the city. I told you that much. From what I can logically piece together from what little information I have. These are sworn men under Fenderack and sometime last night they were all poised for action. All I know is that in one moment I was sleeping, the next the gates of the nine hells were open wide. It was pandemonium in the city and before I could clear the chaos in my own head from picking up the nodes distress, Rembrooke was there and I was burning your letters to me in haste and then running through darkness in the sewers and then into the river. Then next this big dark rider was there scaring the life out of me until I realized it was you and then here we are.” Perdain said and Tarnack smiled.

“Sorry if I scared you.”

“I recognized the soul Tarnack. I told you I would.” Perdain replied and Tarnack just reached over and cupped his cheek in his hand.

“Same here beloved. I just knew that little wet and bedraggled waif in the cloak was you. I felt you long before I laid eyes on you.”

Perdain smiled. “What time is it now?” Perdain asked changing the subject.

“Mid-day. We travel at night for safety so we have time why?”

“It’s been about twelve hours then. Let me think a moment.” Perdain said standing and pacing. His brow worried in thought. Tarnack just smiled and watched. He found the quirk endearing. How many groves had Perdain paced in the archive floors he wondered?

“If I think logically or rather try to think as illogically as my brother. Twelve hours time is a lot, add to that probably several more hours before that. He’d have had to have murdered my parents first.” Here Perdain’s eyes looked pained and Tarnack reached out his hand.

“Grieve your mother dearest.”

“There is no time now.” Perdain said shaking off his sudden emotional upset and resuming his pacing to focus.

“After... that... I do know the council lords have been disbanded. They too are either dead or running as we are. Then the city was thrown into chaos and I know why Fenderack wants that. He wants those nodes rouge. He’ll force them into

chaos by creating it all around him. They were already close, it won't take much to send them over. However I drained many of them these past two years. He won't like what he does have to work with. He'll regret not keeping better watch on me. Now I know why he was so preoccupied. He was getting his men in position and that gave me time to steal some of his thunder. Oh he will hate me dearly, more so than he already does. He's probably already discovered I'm not in the city anymore, which means he will presume, because he is stupid, I am running alone unprotected with only Rembrooke to guard me." Here Perdain grinned and finally looked the youth he was.

"Fenderack is not very bright. He never was. He hits first asks questions never. Therefore, he will send normal soldiers out to track me first. We have that advantage, Fenderack would never in a million years guess I am bonded, let alone bonded to the one man on this earth he hates more than me."

Tarnack nodded and just sat back to listen to Perdain ramble intelligently as he thought out the situation verbally. He'd seen old men do this but never a youth. It hammered home that Perdain was an old soul in a very young body. "So knowing his habits, we have about a week before Fenderack starts sending Wielders and Wellsprings after us, if he has ANY left that support him at this point. After last night I don't think any one of them would follow that man unless they were as rogue as he is. They may have followed my Father out of duty, my father never murdered his own parents to seize the thrown, nor would he have ever forced the city's nodes rogue. He'll lose the last of my father's supporters who were wavering between vows and duty. That is good for us. The bad is we have armies and people to face against. Some of them good men really but desperate to provide for families so they join armies and follow blindly. We will sadly see the bloodshed we'd hoped to avoid. Fenderack has moved his pieces into play before we were ready." Perdain said clutching the blanket around him as he paced.

"True, but we were sort of expecting that after all your warnings dearest." Tarnack said and Perdain nodded as he worried his lip with his teeth as he paced. Yet another trait Tarnack was highly amused with.

"I've thought about this scenario more times than I care to admit. Trying to forecast a counter and in all my consideration and study of past strategies I strongly advise sending out word via the network. Everyone come to Garth and I mean everyone. We need an army and we need it fast. Fenderack already has one and if we're scattered all over the place we'll be run over. Garth is an ideal stronghold. There is a maze under the mountain for a base of operations. The mountains themselves solid against our backs no way for them to come around behind and the valley is flat as far as the eye can see. We'll see the dust cloud from an approaching force in plenty of time to rally against it. That is if we have our men. I'd send word to your father. Every able bodied Man, Wielder and Wellspring come running for Garth before Fenderack wakes up and realizes

we're mobilizing against him. He's slow witted, but eventually someone smarter whispers in his ear. We have to move fast. He'll hit us first thaw in Spring. He'll build up his men during the winter I know how he thinks."

"I'm amazed again at your brilliance my love. I'll send word immediately."

Tarnack wrote the letter to his father first detailing Perdain's plans and almost forgetting to add the best news. He ended his letter informing his parents that he and Perdain were bonded and he sent it off as Perdain dug through the chest trying to find clothes that fit.

By the time Perdain managed to look like a cat lost in a burlap sack and his clothes held on with twine a reply was received.

First were congratulations on their bonding and then a total agreement with Perdain's plans. Ednack would send word through the network that everyone was to fly to Garth and bring with them any and everyone who would follow and along the way destroy the watchtowers and effectively close Fenderack's communication network. He wouldn't know what was happening in his kingdom until it was too late.

Perdain agreed that was brilliant idea and kicked himself for not thinking of it and Tarnack laughed. "Love your brain works overtime enough for twenty men, even you my dearest cannot think of everything at once. Even if you did get most of it yourself." Tarnack said as they rested the rest of the afternoon and ate again before setting out.

For three days, they traveled steadily at night silently listening to the sounds around them and sheltered in way stations during the day. They took time to rest and love each other and forget the war brewing outside for a few moments in each other's arms before they slept and were out again. They made Garth just before dawn on the fourth day and were met by the monks keeping watch for them and ushered immediately to the mountain temple.

The old monk greeted them happily and several other monks had warm food and clothes to welcome the travelers. They had moved the boy wellspring from the main temple to the mountain one to aide. The lad was close to Perdain's age and was as eager to fight but seemed to Tarnack's eyes so much younger than Perdain. While they were of a build and height and of a very similar age, the way Perdain carried himself, the way his eyes drank in every movement for study, the way he exuded calm intelligence once again proved that Perdain was Gods touched and very much a regal Prince of the People.

Once safely sealed inside the temple they were met by Haddy, Deen and Wren and Tarnack was overjoyed they'd survived and hugged them all tightly.

"Lad, you done made me even want to bust you for all those coppers and I love you." Haddy teased and Tarnack smiled as Perdain walked over.

"Are you Haddy? It is a joy to meet you at last." Perdain said holding out his hand and Haddy's eyes widened.

"Bless my soul. Your Highness." Haddy bowed and Perdain just took his hands and made him rise.

"I am just Perdain to all of you. I lost my titles along with everyone else and I would not stand above so many good men and women who fight for the same purpose. Please I beg you, just call me Perdain." He said and Haddy smiled and kissed Perdain's hands.

Tarnack laid an arm around Perdain's shoulders and squeezed and Perdain turned his face up and smiled and Haddy watched again and gasped.

"Don't tell me that you two are...?" He asked and Tarnack winked.

"Aye Haddy. Perdain and I are bonded as well. I am gods blessed to have him as my own." Tarnack said and Perdain just leaned against Tarnack smiling.

"As am I beloved." He replied and Haddy squealed like a boy and not a man of sixty and five.

"Bless my soul! My prayers for you both answered. Prayed for our Tarnack to bond and prayed you free. It seems they were one and the same after all." Haddy winked and Perdain laughed, a gay light voice that sent involuntary shivers down Tarnack's spine.

"Thank you so very much." Perdain said as Rembrooke came into the room and Perdain was a blur across the floor as he threw his arms around his father and cried.

"Thank the gods you are safe my father!" Perdain cried and Rembrooke held him fiercely in return.

"Ah my son I worried so. Are you hurt? Any injuries?" Rembrooke asked testing Perdain's arms and Perdain smiled and shook his head.

"Nay father. I am most happy and well. Come meet Tarnack." Perdain said taking Rembrooke's hand and leading him over.

“So you are Ednack’s son. You must look like your mother lad.” Rembrooke said and Tarnack laughed.

“Aye. I do. I must thank you for all you’ve done Father Rembrooke. Not only for our cause but for my beloved.” Tarnack said and Rembrooke’s eyes widened and he looked from Tarnack to Perdain and Perdain smiled and looped his arm through Tarnack’s.

“Aye my Father. We are bonded.” Perdain said and Rembrooke was hugging them both again with vigor.

“I bloody well knew it, pardon my language. That first letter you sent had Perdain looking like a moonstruck boy and bless me if it wasn’t the first time I ever saw him like that. Every letter after that had him floating on clouds. I knew it had to be a bond!” Rembrooke said and Tarnack laughed.

“I can honestly say I reacted pretty much the same way getting his missives. So we were both moonstruck fools.” Tarnack said and Perdain snuggled up under his arm and hugged his middle.

“You don’t strike me as the moonstruck sort beloved.”

“You didn’t see me kissing your letters did you? I was alone and hopelessly demonstrative in private. You would have laughed at me I’m sure.” Tarnack winked and Perdain just smiled and squeezed.

“I doubt it. I was no better myself.” Perdain said as they moved to the large stone table next to the huge blazing fireplace to eat the meal the monks were bringing out from the kitchens for everyone who had thus far arrived safely.

“A Prince’s Destiny”
A Wielder and Wellspring Story
 Author: D. Sanders
Act IV - The Rogue Wielder King

As the adrenaline from the ride wore off and the heat of the fire and their meal filled them, Perdain was yawning between bites and his head was drooping. Once he finished his meal Tarnack took his hand and stood. “My friends forgive our short company. We we’re riding all night and I fear Perdain and I are falling asleep where we sit. Please excuse us for a few hours, we desperately need sleep.” Tarnack said and one of the other monks stood. A rather small man himself lost in his robe, about Rembrooke’s age and a cheerful kindly smile on his face.

“Please follow me, we’ve already taken the liberty of preparing a room for you I’ll take you.” He said leading the way into the mountain, the beautiful carved stone lit by wall sconces and down at the end of the corridor was a heavy stone door that opened into a cozy windowless room that already had candles burning and a fire going in the small hearth.

It wasn’t a large room and it held just basic necessities. A welcoming looking and large featherbed in the center of the room, the hearth, a small table and chairs. A dresser and chest, a curtained off privy and a small stone tub with running water that looked almost as inviting as the bed itself.

The monk pulled back the bed curtains and then turned to face the pair. “Just rest well and as long as you need to. It has been a long cold journey here and what you both need is warmth first. I’ll find his highness some warm clothes in a much better fit and leave them outside the door for you when you wake. Welcome to Garth, please call me brother Kassa and call whenever you need assistance. Sleep well and you are both so very much in my prayers.” He said softly, his cornflower blue eyes tender and his smile honest and sincere. Perdain walked over and took his hand.

“Thank you brother Kassa. In return please call me just Perdain and I hope my assistance to you just as equal as yours to us.”

“Perdain, it already has been and so very much more. We all follow you both out of love. You are what Holst needs now in these dark times. The Gods light shines in you both. Rest well.” Kassa said moving to the door and leaving.

Tarnack came over and took Perdain’s hand and led him to bed. They shed their clothes right on the floor and gratefully crawled into the comfortable and soft bed and nestled together and both were asleep moments after heads hit pillows.

They slept for only a few hours, just enough to take the edge off their weariness because they were going to have to adjust being up during daylight hours again. Perdain was up first and Tarnack awoke to the sound of running water and he turned his head to see Perdain leaning over the stone tub and filling it with hot water. He hadn't noticed Tarnack was awake yet and Tarnack took that time to just study Perdain's body.

In moments like these was when Tarnack saw the youth in Perdain. He was reed slender from his narrow shoulders down to his toes. He looked as fragile as eggshells and almost as white. He was the epitome of a traditional wellspring; they all appeared deceptively delicate, like a strong breeze would blow them away like stray feathers. Tarnack mused that was probably one of the reasons their wielders felt so obsessively protective. He knew very well Perdain was not as delicate as he looked and it was only in appearance but that didn't make him any less protective of him. He was never going to allow those gentle hands and limbs to lift anything more taxing than a quill to parchment and certainly never fight.

Perdain bent over again to test the water with his hand and Tarnack had to bite back a moan. This was the other side of his obsessive nature and the curse of a bond. Perdain's body stoked fires in Tarnack's soul. The curve of his spine, the round perfect globes of his posterior, his long shapely legs, his narrow hips, his taught flat belly, his small smooth chest with perfect pink nipples and that sinfully beautiful face and long flow of dark hair. Every shape and curve spellbinding to Tarnack.

Which came a little like a shock. Tarnack had always appreciated beautiful men but Perdain was just on the verge of manhood. He'd barely crossed the threshold of adolescence into his early adult years. Still partly boy and partly man. Balancing in between precariously, his mind long into adulthood but his body was still catching up to his maturity. Had Tarnack not known the soul and had seen just the body alone he would have before barely taken a second look Perdain was very young and Tarnack had never been one to lust after boys.

Perdain however sparked desires that were fierce. He loved having Perdain spread bare beneath him and he had developed an appetite of watching himself disappear and reemerge inside of him. Perdain's body was so much smaller than his own and watching his own manhood get lost within that welcoming little body was tantalizing. That small opening forced wide to accept a lover, legs held apart by Tarnack's hands so he could watch himself make love to Perdain.

Perdain's whimpers as his body was forced into submission and invaded were music. They way he'd bite the back of his hand to stifle his moans, the pained face he make when his body surrendered to sweet torture and he came. Tarnack was amazed, enthralled and hungry for more.

He got out of bed and walked over to Perdain and ran his hand down Perdain's spine to cup the curve of his perfect buttocks cheeks. Perdain shivered under the unexpected touch. "You make me burn for you." Tarnack's voice was husky and low in Perdain's ear, making gooseflesh rise on his fair skin.

"Tarnack..." Perdain's voice quivered and Tarnack's hand at Perdain's throat felt him swallow and respond immediately to Tarnack's lust. The way all bonded wellsprings submitted to their wielder's needs.

"Get back in bed and wait for me." Tarnack ordered gruffly and Perdain simply nodded and got back in bed on his back his knees bent and already spread and waiting as ordered ultimately submissive.

Tarnack opened the cupboard next to the tub and grinned, inside was just what he needed and what he'd been wanting while on the road. He grabbed the small bottle of skin oil and brought it back to bed.

"Get on your knees Perdain. Bare yourself to me." Tarnack said and though his eyes were curious, they weren't frightened and Perdain did as told. He offered himself and Tarnack's hand ran over his raised posterior and he spread the cheeks wide to look at the quivering puckering of flesh, already opening. Perdain's body was already becoming trained to respond intimately.

"This is mine and only mine." Tarnack said as he leaned forward and ran the tip of his tongue around the opening and Perdain shivered in response and Tarnack smirked.

"You need this don't you Perdain? You like when I love you here don't you?" Tarnack asked knowing the answer, but he was in the mood for a little rougher play and marking of his territory.

"Aye." Perdain's voice was shaking as much as his body.

"Tell me what you want Perdain."

"You beloved." Perdain moaned as a slick finger toyed with him without penetrating, just teasing the flesh lightly with an oily substance.

"I know that dearest. Tell me exactly." Tarnack urged, purposefully driving Perdain mad.

"Inside, oh please." Perdain whimpered and was rewarded with a single finger and he moaned as it mimicked what he truly wanted.

“Like this?” Tarnack asked watching his finger slip in and out with ease with the aid of the oil, he was liberally coating Perdain, knowing that what was to come was going to be unlike anything he’d done to Perdain before. He was already on fire and just letting the flames build.

“M-more. Please.” Perdain whined and pushed back against those wonderful fingers, feeling two more slip inside. Pulling, widening and opening him fully.

Tarnack watched that small opening of flesh open like a flower to the sun and he wondered just how far he could go. He had all four fingers now working pliant flesh and then he spotted something on the table beside the bed and his feral side ignited, it was perfectly shaped and he wanted to watch more before he took Perdain.

It was just a small slender ceramic god statue. A simple circle sphere on top of a rounded cone. He’d always thought those little formless simple statues highly phallic looking. This one just the right size too, just about the size of a real man’s penis.

Tarnack picked it up and covered it in the oil and silently apologized to the gods for what he was about to do and then did it.

“TARNACK!” Perdain gasped as the statue was pushed into him and then out again.

“Just feel good Perdain, you know I like to watch you devour me. Your body is so divine. Let me watch you feel good.” Tarnack said as he moved the smooth statue in and out of his lover, watching it disappear deeply inside and then out again. The ring of flesh almost hypnotizing to watch conform to the statue and the sucking sounds of wet friction indicating Perdain was overly lubricated and felt no pain and only sinful pleasure.

Perdain was moaning unlike Tarnack had ever heard him before and he was panting and biting the pillows and his whole body was flushed pink and his weeping erection dangling between his legs begged to be stroked.

Tarnack stroked him with one hand while the other moved the statue until Perdain was almost sobbing with pleasure. “So good, Tarnack!” He groaned into the pillows just as his body shuddered and Tarnack’s hand was filled with his semen.

Tarnack pulled the statue out of Perdain’s body and the gaping opening left behind sent Tarnack over the edge. He was up on his knees and burying himself into that welcoming space. Pounding mercilessly and making Perdain weep in over sensitized lust.

Harder and Harder Tarnack drove his thrusts until he was sweating profusely and roughly taking his lover like a were feral beast in heat. The whole bed was creaking and groaning under the strain of such violent lovemaking and then heaved a sigh of relief as Tarnack groaned and emptied his seed deep in Perdain's shaking body.

As he pulled out again he watched his own semen trickle out of Perdain and down a quivering leg. Perdain's entire being owned by Tarnack in that moment. His soul, his heart, his mind and his young body, all of it belonged to Tarnack and had been claimed and possessed. He was still totally submissive and waiting for his next order. Tarnack pulled him up into his arms and kissed him breathless before he scooped him up in his arms and carried him back over to the tub.

He laid Perdain gently in the still warm water and then washed him head to toe. "I will never leave you abused. You are my treasure." Tarnack said as he rinsed Perdain's hair and ran loving hands all along his body.

Perdain's smile spoke volumes. "That was not abuse my love. That was heaven on earth." He sighed and Tarnack leaned over and kissed him again where he knelt beside the tub.

"I love you Perdain with all I am."

"Just as I love you. Please now come join me in the water. You too are in need now dearest." He said sitting forward and Tarnack crawled into the water with him and he washed quickly and just settled back to soak away tired muscles and hold a soft lover close to his heart.

Fenderack sat in his throne and grinned, a truly merciless and feral turn of his lips his eyes cold gray orbs that held boundless traces of sheer evil. The nodes in the city were all his, all filled with angry boiling energy but he'd expected so much more. The grin turned to a frown. "Perdain..." He hissed as his general came into the throne room and knelt before him.

"Did you find him?" Fenderack demanded and the man shook his head.

"Nay sire. We tore the temple apart looking for him he is not there and neither is his mentor Rembrooke they have fled."

"Does the stupid monk think he can protect a wellspring out in the open? They attract danger like flies to honey. They won't get far send out men to track them." Fenderack said and the Man nodded.

"I already have sir. We found three sets of footprints, two booted one bare down in the catacombs that lead to the sewers and to the River. The tracks begin again about a mile down the River, only the booted feet. There is indication of a horse. The barefooted one either has already fallen to a mounted soldier or the River."

"Or was picked up on a mount you stupid fool. Just because I played the simpleton card don't underestimate me." Fenderack said standing to stalk the room.

"Which way were the tracks headed?"

"East sire. My men tracked the trail several miles. The horse tracks end a few miles down the road, it seemed to have vanished into the brush itself, the booted feet tracks continue along the riverbed all East."

"Then they are working together and split for protection. Someone has Perdain and I want to know who! Find me anything in his rooms that you think will give us a clue!" Fenderack said and the man pulled out a single charred piece of parchment. The letter section entirely destroyed, just a single burnt corner remained and the first letter of the signature was missing but enough remained to piece together a name. 'arnack'.

"TARNACK! That traitor was near and you missed him? His horse is recognizable for miles you idiot! Furthermore how could any of my spies have missed my brother receiving letters from this outlaw! Bring me my spies I want answers!" Fenderack shouted and his general obeyed and within minutes two servants that worked in the temple were brought in and thrown to their knees in front of Fenderack.

"All you reported to me was the same old useless information! That he was studying in the archives! I want you both to think very clearly, just what was my brother working on?" Fenderack demanded.

"We can't read sire. Just lots of old books and scrolls mostly. Taking lots of notes he was in his books like always."

"Did you see him writing letters?"

"Nay sire, we couldn't get into his private rooms. Only Father Rembrooke ever entered those rooms."

"Did you see the Good Father taking things out with him?"

"Always he does. Papers to grade and such."

"Did any of them look like letters?"

“May have sire, may not, didn’t look like anything other than what it always looks.”

“Preserve me from idiots! Where did Rembrooke go? Did he go back to his rooms?”

“Sometimes, sometimes he went to the pub. He went to that pub for years he had didn’t seem unusual. He was friends with the owners, went three or four times a week even before Perdain came to the temple.”

“Where is Rembrooke now?”

“Don’t know sire. We lost him in the fires. He didn’t have Perdain with him.”

“That is something then. Which means he’d already handed off Perdain to someone. But who? Who else was working with them? Did Rembrooke talk to anyone unusual?”

“He talks to a right many people on the street. Monks all do. You didn’t tell us to keep track of Rembrooke only his highness.” The one said and Fenderack stood angrily.

“PERDAIN you fools! Remember he has lost his titles! Address him not as royalty the useless catamite! Good for nothing than being a bed toy to a wielder! Which is why he no longer has his titles! Get out you fools!” Fenderack shouted and the two servants fled and Fenderack turned to his general.

“Olsgurth, your spies out tracking Tarnack what do they report?”

“As always a step behind him. Slippery as an Eel he is, never stays anywhere for long. Does not use any roads we monitor. We only get reports after he’s been to a village in secret. Holding those Rebellion meetings and no one tells who attended and who didn’t. Everyone tight lipped and no one offering him up for coppers. It’s like he’s some sort of bloody hero to them!”

“Apparently to my Brother too. Secret letters, secret rendezvous. If Perdain is with Tarnack now we’re like as not going to find them until they wish us too. Just hope they didn’t bond, I care not to think the power Tarnack will gain if he bonds to Perdain.”

“Is He that strong Sire?”

“Perdain is hotter than all the nodes in the city combined. I had planned to use him myself and if you find him he is to be left unharmed and brought to me immediately in secret. Bring him to the palace and lock him in the cellars. He’s

one public wellspring I intend on hording. Where are the other un-bonded wellsprings?"

"We rounded 'em up like you said sire and they are locked up downstairs. Only five girls, all under fifteen. Three of them sisters. Two under ten." He said and Fenderack grinned.

"Any of them pretty?"

"Aye sire most."

"Good, bring me one of the youngest ones to my chambers and call a council for later tonight."

Olsgruth shivered and did as ordered. Fenderack had always had a liking for little girls and he pitied the child but did as ordered. He was no fool, Fenderack was not only King but a powerful wielder anyone who told that man 'no' was facing their own death in the face.

Perdain shot up out of the bath so quickly he startled Tarnack and he was gripping his head in agony and he was sobbing in very real torment. "Perdain!" He said leaping out of the tub to gather Perdain in his arms as he shook and sobbed.

"Don't you hear her?" Perdain asked and Tarnack shook his head.

"Who Love?"

Perdain couldn't talk just scabbled his way on his hands and knees over to the privy and heaved uncontrollably. Tarnack raced to the door and threw it open.

"Bring me a healer! Quickly!" Tarnack shouted and returned to Perdain to lay a cool rag on his brow as he sobbed and sobbed.

Caery came in with Kassa and went to Perdain's side.

"What's wrong?" Caery asked seeing Perdain was lost emotionally.

"I don't know he just grabbed his head crying and asked if I could hear her?" Tarnack said and Perdain turned frantic eyes up at Tarnack and grabbed his shoulders.

“Fenderack is... He’s... Oh Gods he’s got wellsprings! CHILDREN! He’s... he’s... she’s only eight years old!” Perdain wept and sobbed and everyone else’s eyes turned to horror.”

“How do you know this?”

“I hear her! She’s calling out for help!” Perdain stood on shaky legs and stumbled to the table, gripping it for support frantically searching the room and then seeing what he was looking for. A vein of pure quartz in the wall, stone itself known to amplify node energy and he staggered over and placed both his hands on the stone and dove deeply into the power that was all connected to one another. He followed the ley lines, back to the city.

“All the nodes rouge in the city! She’s in the palace, I sense four other wellsprings hurting under the rouge power. Little one, oh gods what he’s doing to her!”

Caery sat there stunned. “The palace is two hundred leagues from here! How can you reach that far?” She asked coming over to lay her hands over Perdain’s, diving into his well and following his lead and piggy-backing on his energy.

“GODS MERCY! Get Mundy in here now!” Caery called and Mundy came running and like Caery used Perdain as a ladder to extend her own reach.

Tarnack modestly wrapped in a towel and Perdain oblivious to his own nakedness stood there with the other wellsprings against the wall as Yancy and Pavel raced in.

“What’s happening?” Yancy asked and Tarnack shrugged.

“I don’t know myself yet. Perdain is leading the others into the city nodes. All I know so far is he picked up on a wellspring calling for help and it’s making me sick to think about. If what little I caught from Perdain’s rambling is what I think it means. We’ve got Fenderack raping children on top of everything else.”

“Gods no.” Yancy said and Tarnack nodded.

“I feel the girls! You’re right, four young ones, three feel exactly alike, like siblings. The other one different and BLESS THE MAKER the fifth! He’s making her ROUGE!”

“Aye. Reach her! Call her mind away! Better to die than go rouge like this! Not like this!” Perdain said reaching and shaking and sobbing with grief.

“Kill her?”

“Set her soul free! Her body is but a shell! Think if it your daughter! Free her from this, no recovery in this life anyway once a wellspring goes rouge! It’s torture!” Perdain wept pulling and calling for the little girl to flee to him and calling the other terrified girls into the power lines. He felt each of them connect and help pull at the little girl and then peace. She was no longer screaming, no longer fighting and her well’s light blinked out. There was a backlash of rage that sent Mundy, Caery and Perdain flying off the wall with force and all three wielder’s dove to catch them.

“Fenderack felt us at the last moment, but not soon enough. The girl is at peace now.” Perdain said turning into Tarnack’s chest to weep and Kassa laid a blanket over his shoulders to cover his modesty.

“The others?” Yancy asked and Caery sighed.

“Will commit suicide now. They saw what Fenderack was doing to her. The one thing a wellspring knows is that death is preferable than going rouge.” She said fighting her own tears and Mundy looked devastated.

“What sort of monster is he?” Mundy asked and Perdain sighed.

“Were-man he is. Feral as the beasts gone rouge. All his life this way. Stole from my well even in the womb and he learned all his tricks on making wellsprings turn rouge by experimenting on me. He is mad. Truly mad.” Perdain shivered and Tarnack held him close.

“Love, how on earth did you know? I’ve never known a wellspring with that sort of range ever in my life.”

“The mountain is full of quartz that runs deep. All nodes are connected to each other by at least one ley line if not more and the quartz resonates the power like an amplifier. She was being blasted open and her power traveled the ley lines and I heard her. I followed them back and tapped into the nodes under the palace.”

“But still, that’s a long way Love.”

“Aye, Mundy and I had to ride piggy back on him to reach that far. Perdain you are ten wellsprings.” Caery said and Perdain just sighed.

“I wasn’t born that way. What you felt him doing to her he did to me, many, many times and he’d stop just before I went rogue. Just over the years, every time he pulled me apart I healed a little larger than before. He made me this way and I swear to the Gods I will make him rue the day he made me this strong. I will not let him butcher my people!” Perdain growled and for the first time, he sounded not like a scholar or a Prince, but like a King.

“And we stand with you every step of the way your Highness.” Mundy said taking his hand and followed by Caery.

“Aye. Where you go we stand too! You are our King!” she said and Tarnack would remember this moment the rest of his life. The moment his sheer pride in his husband grew to astronomical proportions.

“Aye dearest, we all stand with you. Where you lead I follow with all my heart and soul.” Tarnack said and Perdain turned his eyes up to Tarnack and smiled.

“You had better beloved. I need you.” Perdain said and Tarnack chuckled.

“Probably about as much as I need you beloved. Are you feeling balanced again?”

“Aye.”

“Good. Now then. Yancy, send this news out of the network. They have to know Fenderack is targeting unmatched wellsprings and that the city has gone totally rogue. Pavel and Mundy please monitor the ley lines, make sure Fenderack didn't trace Perdain back here and that was just a reactionary backlash. First I'm going to get food down Perdain's belly and we'll brainstorm our next plan of action. We can't sit idle and wait for them to come to us, we need back-up strategies.” Tarnack said standing and helping Perdain rise. The others went off to take care of matters and Kassa joined by Rembrooke helped get Perdain dressed and led the pair to the main stone table where other scholars had gathered with archive scrolls and the candles burned as they all sat down to brainstorm and eat.

Fenderack was livid. He'd almost had the girl bent to his will when he'd felt the presence of his brother. He'd know the taste of his power anywhere and before Fenderack could react, Perdain had the girl and then her well was extinct, drained dry and siphoned off into ley lines. Fenderack sent a blast of angry power down the connection and he felt Perdain shut his well and all was gone. Just a vague direction of east remained which Fenderack already knew.

He had to be still close however to have been able to feel the girl. Fenderack left the dead child in his bed and called for Olsgurth.

Olsgurth couldn't look at the bed, the child was mutilated, bound and gagged and a host of other unmentionable things had been done to her. Olsgurth stood eyes cast downwards in front of the king.

“Perdain has meddled again in my affairs. He’s east and he can’t be far if he can still tap into the city matrix! Most Wellsprings have a forty league reach but Perdain is strong. I know he can reach at least a hundred leagues by himself.”

“Should we go to Garth?”

“Not even Perdain can reach two hundred leagues. He’s not that far, but go if you wish, quietly. Find him!”

“Yes sire.” Olsgurth said turning and grabbing two of his best riders sent them out as fast as they could ride toward Garth in search of Perdain.

Perdain was seated at the head of the long stone table, Tarnack directly to his right and they were both bent over a map of the city. A half eaten sandwich in Perdain’s hand left forgotten as he pointed to key areas with his other hand.

“Here under the temple is the largest node and there is a river of a ley line that connects it to the node under the palace. Five smaller nodes make up the matrix under the city. There’s the smallest node here under where the tavern is, that one is sort of like a bastard step-child of the temple node. Then there is one here under the estates of the nobles, two in the mid-district and one under the stockyards. They form almost a perfect star with the temple node in its center. It’s why the city was built on this location, it’s the hottest spot of power in Holst.” Perdain said tracing his finger in a star pattern to show everyone looking and hovering over them the layout of power.

“Everything feeds of the central node under the Temple. Once that went rouge all the others followed suit. It’s pointless right now to try to cleanse them I can guarantee Fenderack has them all shielded. He’ll keep them contained so only he can use the power and also keep it so every beast doesn’t immediately turn were feral. Even he isn’t that stupid.”

“Does he have enough strength to do that? I know I’m sweating bullets trying to contain a single rouge node.” Tarnack said and Perdain shook his head.

“You have to think in reverse dearest. You struggle with rogue power because your body recoils from the taint. How many untainted nodes can you work with at once?”

“Ah, I see your point. Quite a few at once, the most I touched at once was twelve and had there been more I could have easily.”

“Precisely. He thrives on corruption so shielding rouge power to him is like you putting a barrier around a clean one. Easy because your body is in harmony with

the power and you're not acting like a positive and negative magnet. You know how when you try to put two magnets together the wrong way they push apart and then the right way they snap together. The same principle applies."

"When did you figure all this out?" Rembrooke asked and Perdain smiled.

"I had quite a bit of study time in the temple if you remember my Father." Perdain said and Rembrooke chuckled.

"Silly me. I never could keep up with you." He said and Perdain smiled.

"Liar." Perdain winked turning back to his map and suddenly remembering his sandwich took a bite before continuing.

"So my point in this gentlemen and ladies is you have a rogue wielder with access to five very large nodes suited to only him. You cannot use his power matrix but sadly he can use yours. It's much easier to taint power than to cleanse it. You need wellsprings to clean. However, anyone can taint. If he causes enough havoc the people themselves will do his work for him. I may call him stupid intellectually I will never underestimate his deviousness. That he has in abundance. He can be remarkably sharp when he is focused on obtaining something he wants. He's proven that already. He had our father totally in the dark about his nature, in public in front of the lords he could charm the spots off a leopard. He missed his calling in acting, he is ever two faced. He will smile at you as he plunges the dagger into your back. He keeps his friends close and his enemies closer. Do we know which lords still remain in the city?" Perdain asked and Kassa brought out a list.

"The bell code from the City temple rang out seven families still resident and not turned out." He said handing over the list.

"This is your core gentlemen, these are all Fenderack's supporters I know these names well. These were the crucial votes that stripped me of my title and cast wellsprings into slavery. Not a single wielder or wellspring ever born from these bloodlines, they hate us all on principle. They'd rather follow a rogue than admit petty jealousy over lack of gifts in their bloodlines. Sadly most of the ruling families in Holst are ungifted. If you trace back our gifts and bloodlines back far enough, you'll come to a single eight people." Perdain said holding up his hand to show his ring.

"I used to think those legends myth like everyone else, until Tarnack sent me this. This is a Gods Ring." Perdain said and Tarnack nodded.

"Aye, that's been in my family for thousands of years." Tarnack said taking Perdain's hand and kissing the ring on his finger. "It belongs on your hand." He added and Perdain smiled.

“My word! I saw that ring on your hand boy! How on earth can it fit the little one’s now?” Haddy remarked and Perdain smiled.

“It adjusted itself to my hand when I put it on. That was how I knew this was a real Gods Ring and not a copy. Therefore, I scoured the old scrolls in the archives and I did research. Every Wielder and Wellspring alive today can trace themselves back to the original eight. Their children mixed and bonded, and then their children again and so forth and so on but in the end we all come from a limited breeding stock. Current records show there are one hundred bonded pairs, thirty un-bonded wielders and exactly thirty un-bonded wellsprings. We are always born in pairs, there’s never one born without a match elsewhere. This is proof of gods design every wielder and every wellspring does have a match. We may be born at different times like Tarnack and myself, but we are matched and for good reasons. It’s a natural balance of Power and Source of Power.”

“Sadly, five of our Wielders just lost their matches and five more are separated from theirs because our boy wellsprings are now under lock and key. It’s crucial we do not let this unbalance continue. Whether the laws ever get rescinded or not, the temples must turn blind eyes to wielders tapping into our boys from outside. That’s the only way those pairs will ever bond together. That’s how we can circumvent the laws there where boys are concerned. Where the laws for all wellsprings come in will be a bit harder. You know very well the lords wrote those laws, they are pure greed. If they can’t have power they’ll take everything else you have. Those will be a lot harder to rescind. Those men won’t budge and you know it takes a unanimous vote in council to rescind a dog tax let alone ones of this magnitude. I hold no false hopes in trying to get these laws off the books now that they are there. It’s a sad fact and a futile effort right now to even attempt. We have much larger problems in Fenderack.” Perdain said taking a drink from his cup before continuing to speak to a rapt audience.

“First we have to deal with the mad dog on the throne. We need to know what he’s doing. What his plans are and his long term agenda. If he even has one beyond just usurping the throne, from my experience with him he tends not to think long term only in the immediate. He can’t think in consequences to actions and that is my father’s fault. His actions never caused repercussions, he was never punished and he’s had his way his whole life. The only person ever to attempt to teach him right from wrong was overruled and thus my brother learned that he had nothing to stop him because father would always stop the punishment. On the reverse, my father would punish me if I spilled a glass of milk so I learned very early to over think my actions and forecast the outcome so I could avoid that spanking. I can’t brush my hair at night without wondering about the wear and tear on my brush bristles it’s become habit that I am glad of now.” Perdain said and Tarnack smiled.

“It explains a lot about you love.”

“That I am an obsessive thinker? Oh aye. I’ll think myself into a series of sleepless nights if you let me. I beg you to knock me out if it comes to that. Ask Father Rembrooke how many times he’s had to slip sleeping powder into my dinner wine so I’d sleep.”

“Far too many times boy and I’ve already gotten some for you here. I know you and what we’re facing now will turn you into an insomniac. Tarnack make sure you watch him.”

“Absolutely.” Tarnack winked and Perdain smiled and turned back to his maps and notes and as an afterthought his sandwich. Tarnack watching Perdain’s habits half amused half concerned. No wonder he was so skinny if it took him over an hour to eat a sandwich and still not have it finished. He was an obsessive minded person and once focused intellectually he ignored his body’s needs. Tarnack would watch more than his sleeping habits, but his eating habits too. This was the last time he was going to allow Perdain to work at a meal.

“Do we have any spies in the city left? Anyone we can trust that can get in close to Fenderack?” Perdain asked and Rembrooke sat back and scratched his chin.

“I know he had two on us for long time watching and doing a poor job of it.” Rembrooke said and Perdain nodded.

“Aye. I know the two cleaning servants. I noticed.” Perdain replied amused and returned to his sandwich while waiting for Rembrooke to form a reply.

“We can count out any wielders or wellsprings in the area due to the rouge nodes they’ll have fled the city themselves and are not likely to return without help and We’ve already managed to reach most and they’re all on their way here anyway. Which leaves our tavern network. Haddy is obviously here and knows more about that network than we do.” Rembrooke said turning to Haddy.

“Rusgard’s your man. He’s had all them mercs in his joint since they done arrived. You know soldier’s fight and drink get loose tongues often. If you get him a message, he’ll keep track of what’s going down the pike and then send it on. Might be best if it’s done through the temple. Rusgard’s always known to go to temple to pray every week like clock work and won’t seem a bit suspicious.” Haddy said and Perdain smiled.

“Then I’ll write him a letter and we can send it to Gilles in the temple and he can make sure Rusgard gets the message. Then he can report to Gilles who will send us information in bell code. We need to know all he already knows now. Timing is crucial.” Perdain said making a note when Tarnack spoke up.

“Better yet, if we have the bells ringing so often that will draw attention. If Gilles can put that letter in the bell tower for retrieval I’m one of the few men who can not only send letters but retrieve them. It will have to be in the same place every time but if I have a focus like the bell tower to picture I can pull a letter to me.”

“You never told me that.” Perdain said and Tarnack grinned.

“A lot easier to send then fetch and you had wielders to send to me dearest. Had you not I’d have told you. I didn’t think it was important then, it is now.” Tarnack said and Perdain grinned.

“I’m sure you would have.” Perdain said and involuntarily yawned. Tarnack stood.

“Enough for one day beloved. We can’t do anymore today and I’d rather wait until we had more people here and more information before we do make anymore plans anyway. We’ve got enough to think on at the moment as is.” Tarnack said reaching down to take Perdain’s hand.

“Everyone just rest up and if you think of any questions big or small write them down and we’ll meet again in the morning. Take the rest of the afternoon and evening for yourselves and find a way to relax. Sometimes the best questions come when they are not forced and are just left to form on their own.” Tarnack said leading Perdain with him back to their room.

Rembrooke arrived behind them a few minutes later and knocked. Perdain was sitting cross legged on the bed smiling as he was called to just enter. “Where’s Tarnack?”

“You just missed him in the hall probably. He’s not satisfied with my eating habits and as gone to fetch me more to eat with a threat he’ll shove it down my throat if he has to.” Perdain said and Rembrooke laughed.

“Finally a man you may listen to. You never did pay attention to me when I told you to stop reading and eat.” He said setting down a box of sleeping powders on the table and pulling up a chair.

“Are you happy son? Truly?”

“Oh aye father. Tarnack is wonderful on my soul. Now that we are in private I must thank you too for preparing me for what loving is like. I would have been very scared otherwise.” Perdain said and Rembrooke smiled.

“I know son. We all are that first time. I tried my best.”

“You succeed father. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome love.” Rembrooke said as another knock came and this time it was Kassa.

“Your highness, I managed to find you some more clothes other than that jerkin and trousers. These will be much warmer in the mountain for you.” Kassa said bringing in several changes of warm colorful wools and thick knitted cotton socks.

He laid them in the chest and Perdain smiled. “Thank you so much Kassa, what you’ve already brought fit nicely.”

“You’re small like me lad, I know what a bear it is to find clothes cut small enough.” He grinned and Rembrooke smiled.

“How can anyone tell under that Robe Kassa?” Rembrooke asked and Kassa smiled.

“My robes I like big over my clothes. They keep me warmer. When you’re skinny and in cold mountains you need all the help you can get.” He said happily just as Tarnack arrived with a tray of tea sandwiches and a steaming kettle of tea.

“Looks like we have company and thankfully I have enough. Care to join us for afternoon tea fathers?” Tarnack asked and everyone pulled up chairs at the small table and ate finger sandwiches and talked about other things apart from war.

Tarnack learned just how much of a father figure to Perdain Rembrooke had been over the years and it was obvious they had a solid father, son relationship bond. He could see why Gergaine had chosen him. He was of a similar age to Perdain’s real parents, thirty-nine currently, intelligent, non-breeder, the list of compatible traits a boy of seven could have bonded to for guidance was long. It did Tarnack’s heart good to see Perdain had been raised and loved by this man and encouraged to flourish even in confinement.

They learned Kassa had come to the temple almost as early as Perdain had. Orphaned when he was eight the monks had taken him in and he had never left the temple. He was now thirty-five and his whole life revolved around service to the gods. Specifically his calling lay in the healing arts and medicines and it was from Kassa that Rembrooke had obtained the sleeping powders. Kassa was a genuinely tender and kind soul and it was impossible not to like him. Kassa like Rembrooke had taken in young wellspring Rindi to comfort when he’d fled to the temple in Garth to spare his parents becoming traitors. You’d often find Rindi in Kassa’s company, the boy looking to Kassa like a mentor and a secure place to anchor to during chaotic times. Tarnack had always loved monks, he’d not met a single one of them that didn’t have in one way or another a gods touched soul. Granted there was a few persnickety old bastards occasionally he’d met, but on the whole even they had honest hearts and always did the right thing. Even if they did bitch and moan as they did it. They were human like everyone else.

They sometimes had wives or children and there was always a special section in the temple reserved for the families and Tarnack noticed that the wives generally were as scholarly and saintly as the men they'd married. It wasn't uncommon for the wives to be teaching right alongside their husbands in the temple schools.

They had and often took lovers amongst themselves, Tarnack had always noticed a disproportionately high number of non-breeders in the ranks of the temple dwellers, but he always noticed non-breeders, he joked to his friends he could peg a non-breeder at fifty paces sometimes just based on how they walked. He called it his sixth sense. It was a joke, but fairly true his hunch was right most of the time and it was hard to tell with Rembrooke, but Tarnack could still tell. With Kassa it was easy, that man was definitely a non-breeder Tarnack mused to himself that if you listened hard enough you could hear the swish in his walk.

Monks weren't forbidden love or lovers, even if some took vows of chastity it was their choice to make. They were mainly scholars and highly spiritual men who only vowed service to the Gods to teach and educate the people and give comfort to the soul and guidance to the lost. To give to all in need and to shelter the flock.

After their short chat over tea, Kassa and Rembrooke left together discussing rhetoric and the medicinal properties of herbs and looking to be bonding intellectually. They were quite animated like school boys over final exams and Tarnack mused they'd talk each other's ears off before the night was finished. He also predicted come tomorrow they'd probably also be lovers, they were compatible enough. He kept that to himself too while Perdain settled down for a nap while Tarnack wrote his letter to Gilles in the temple and sent it off before joining Perdain to rest a while before dinner.

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Act V - Arrivals for the People’s Army

At dinner that evening the first group of arrivals began showing up at the temple. Four bonded pairs of traveling Wielders and Wellsprings who had fled the city and two un-bonded Wielder youths. Both hardly more than seventeen and looking exhausted and grateful for a warm meal and fire.

Thomus, one of the un-bonded lads sporting a large gash over his eye. “It’s a bloody nightmare it is. I was coming around the west side of the city when I saw it light up like a funeral pyre. I swear I have never seen such butchery in all my life. People were running and mounted soldiers were cuttin’ ‘em down left and right. I had to throw up a dozen or more barriers just to block out the rouge power from disabling me completely and with what little power left in the land untainted I couldn’t scare up enough energy to throw enough power to zap a fly. Thanks to me dad for being a blacksmithy swordsman and teachin’ me how to use a bloody blade and not trust just my gifts. I needed that or I’d be a corpse too. I picked up a dozen or so people and we fought our way into the woods and then I got the message to come to Garth and here we are. The people are being taken in by the villagers here and bless you, we’ve been frozen and starved for days.” He said shoveling in his stew as Rindi and Kassa came in with gauze and alcohol to take a look at the nasty cut over his eye.

Kassa leaned over and looked at it. “How did you get this?” He asked as Rindi prepared a swab of alcohol.

“Was almost me neck if I hadn’t have ducked. Sword caught me, I’m bloody lucky.” Thomus said his attention not on Kassa but on the quite fair and pretty young wellspring behind him suddenly.

“This is deep too. Rindi love hand me the alcohol then find my kit, he’s going to need stitches in this.” Kassa said and Rindi nodded and retrieved Kassa’s medical kit and began threading the needle with long slender fingers.

He sterilized the needle and set it on clean gauze on the table and turned and smiled at the young wielder as Thomus hissed when the alcohol burned his cut.

“Here, take my hand sir and use my well to block out the pain.” Rindi said offering his hand which Thomus took and Kassa had to stop treating the wound when both boys jolted in shock and happy smiles spread on both their faces.

“Bless me and call me the luckiest bastard alive! Hold on a minute father.” Thomus said pulling Rindi into his lap with a grin. “Rindi right?”

“Aye.” Rindi laughed his eyes so filled with joy it was palpable.

“Worth fighting to hell and back to get here. Didn’t think I’d find my wellspring here I sure didn’t. Pretty as sunshine you are.” Thomus said and Rindi visibly melted with the compliment.

Tarnack felt Perdain’s hand slip into his and he squeezed. Seventeen year old Rindi now was free too and his wielder was all back country drawl and swagger and looked over the moon with happiness.

“Give us a kiss for luck?” Thomus asked and Rindi smiled.

“Aye.” Rindi said and the entire room erupted with hoots and catcalls as Thomus planted a fierce kiss on Rindi’s shocked and delighted lips.

“If you boys are finished? We have a little matter with a nasty cut to deal with first. You can play in a minute.” Kassa teased happily as he bent over Rindi still on Thomus’ lap and he finished cleaning the wound then stitching it shut before dismissing the youths. Thomus’s dinner was finished in private in Rindi’s rooms and every wielder and wellspring in the temple knew the exact moment the bond was consummated.

“Ah, first time bonding. Lights up like fireworks and makes us all feel good.” Mundy said chuckling into her coffee and Pavel laughed.

“Aye. You wellsprings all manage to make us drunk with power most times and that first time like dancing in a river of fire. You all know how to catch your men and keep us slaves to you.” Pavel said kissing his wife’s cheek.

“Slave? Oh that’s nice to know. Would my slave mind getting me another cup of coffee?” Mundy asked and Pavel stood and bowed.

“At your service mistress.” He said going to grab the carafe and everyone was chuckling at the table, knowing precisely what bonds were like first hand.

Perdain grinned at Tarnack and winked and Tarnack chuckled. “Aye, slave to you too and you know it.”

“Aye.” Perdain chuckled moving to sit in Tarnack’s lap sipping his tea and just enjoying a nice relaxing evening. Everyone was just listening to road tales and gathering information but it was decided no plans would be actually discussed until the morning meeting and see who else filtered in during the night.

Rindi's parents along with seven other bonded pairs, two unmatched female wellsprings both children and three more un-bonded youths came in all throughout the night the last un-bonded youth coming in riding hell-bent for leather throwing up mental alarms.

::Two riders on the road, soldiers wearing Fenderack's colors, not two leagues behind me and coming fast. Stay low everyone!:: He broadcast telepathically as he rode through Garth and to the mountain temple behind it where he was helped off his horse and two monks led the horse to safety to get him watered and tended while the eighteen year old youth was led inside the temple quickly that dawn.

"Almost ran right into them coming off the junction from the road to Haversmead. They were camped off the side of the road and bugger it all if I didn't wake the bastards. I faked ignorance and just apologized for waking them. Then turned up the road riding as offhandedly nonchalant as I could until I got out of sight and then laid ears flat. I monitored them and they waited until I was out of sight before they started after me. They'll be here in less than fifteen minutes." He said out of breath and Tarnack stood.

"Then I think we shall go meet our guests and get some information." He said strolling out with Pavel and Yancy and taking up positions around the road that lead into Garth.

The rider's came barreling into Garth kicking up dust and their horses rearing as they pulled up fast. Both burly looking mercenaries wearing black and silver arm bands. "By order of his Majesty, King Fenderack of Holst we are looking for the traitors Tarnack and Perdain. Five hundred thousand reward offered for their capture!" One said and Tarnack just grinned, removed his vest that held his wielder patch and strolled outside.

"Five hundred thousand you say for one or both?" He asked and the first soldier turned.

"That's each. Do you have any information?" He asked unaware he was talking to Tarnack and Yancy and Pavel were stifling laughter watching hidden.

"Last I heard Tarnack was alone. What's with Prince Perdain now? Isn't he in the temple in the city?"

"That's just Perdain, you will cease calling him by his title by order of King Fenderack!"

"Fine, Fine. However, you didn't answer my question good sir. Is Perdain traveling with Tarnack now?"

“The King suspects the Traitor Tarnack stole Perdain from the Temple and that Perdain was a willing aid to the Traitor Tarnack. In cahoots.”

“Wow, so let me get this straight. Tarnack is rumored to have actually been in the city during the chaos and managed to get in and out again without being seen while carrying Perdain. That’s pretty slick, wish I’d have actually done that. Sad to say gentlemen I did not. Now please freeze there a moment while I consider more questions for you.” Tarnack said waving his hand and both men went rigid in their saddles, horses and all frozen immobile.

“Tarnack! You’re Tarnack?” One gasped and Tarnack grinned and gave a little bow.

“The one and only and I cannot believe Fenderack still only sends soldiers after me. It’s pathetically easy to catch you I hope you realize.” Tarnack said as Pavel and Yancy came out of hiding.

“It takes a lot more than two to trap a wielder gentlemen.” Yancy chuckled handing Tarnack back his vest. He shrugged it on and circled his prey like a hawk.

“Tell me first gentlemen, and mind you only truth will be able to fall from your lips, why do you follow a butcher like Fenderack?”

“He’s the King of course. Pays men good he does.”

“He’s a murderous son not fit to rule a pigsty. Now we know where all the seized assets of our wellsprings are going. Into these men’s pockets. How does it feel to know your coppers are food out of children’s mouths and homes taken away from people turned out into the streets? People forced into poverty overnight to buy you a beer at night?” Tarnack asked and both men swallowed.

“How can you murder innocent citizens to help put insanity on the throne?” Tarnack asked.

“We’re just soldiers, it’s lords who hire us, we don’t ask where pay comes from. Its just pay.”

“It’s blood of the innocent!” Tarnack shouted just as Perdain walked forward regally and both men on horseback’s eyes grew wide. He walked calmly and gracefully forward, dressed in dark slate blue with a wellspring patch on his breast. His hair unbound waving in the breeze and around his brow sat a silver and gold circlet. He looked every inch a Prince as he strode forward and paused beside Tarnack.

"I believe my Husband asked you both another question you have failed to answer. How can you murder innocent citizens in my brother's name?" Perdain asked and both men looked shocked.

"It's orders! We do as told."

"You would answer my Bonded Husband with due respect and call him Your Highness when addressing him." Tarnack said watching Perdain stand tall and proud and his grey blue eyes stern as he faced the men.

::Where did you get the crown?: Tarnack asked and an amused voice answered him.

::It's brass and tin wire love. I've learned illusion sometimes has greater effect.::

::It worked on me love:: Tarnack said, their faces never betraying their personal conversation.

"The King gave orders, even the father took his titles away!"

"True, but not the blood in my veins. The same blood which flows in my Twin and it was not my hand which struck down our good Father and mother to steal a throne and kingdom. It was not my hand that ordered the murders of innocent citizens and it was not my hand that raped and murdered innocent child wellsprings to steal their powers and turn them rogue. However, it will be my hand that will not rest until he is stopped. I will not allow the people of Holst to suffer under his madness, I will not allow innocent blood to be spilt to feed his depravity and I will not allow him to destroy our land with his corruption. My reach is long, my will stronger, my faith purer and by the Gods Will above I vow to stop him if it takes my very last breath. With my Good Husband and the people by my side we shall not fail." Perdain said and the square was filled with villagers and those of the Rebellion behind him. The beginnings of a powerful army.

"Look behind us gentlemen. The people stand strong, Wielders and Wellsprings unite under a common banner. It is the vows we take to the Gods to First Protect the People and Second the Land Under the Gods Will. Fenderack has never taken these vows, but we have. We are the people, and we stand against him as one. You may call us the Rebellion, but we are the People's Army. It is Fenderack who rebels against the Gods Will, he serves only himself and such greed has doomed his immortal soul. You can take a message back to my brother. Tell him what you have seen here today, tell him many more follow and are already within a few leagues of here. His watchtowers are gone, the villages protected from him. He has only the city and he'd better be prepared because we are coming to take that from him too. If he values his life he will have the winter to cherish it, come spring it is forfeit. Best to make strong your defenses

gentlemen, because any who still stand with Fenderack will die with him.”
Perdain said turning to Tarnack.

“They can walk back to the city, I’d not send a beast back into hell again. If they are caught by were beasts that is under the Gods discretion but leave them their swords.” Perdain said and walked away and Tarnack just smiled proudly after his husband.

“You heard His Highness. Off with you.” Tarnack said releasing the men from their imprisonment and watching them run on foot west.

Perdain was behind a building shaking like a leaf when Tarnack came back around. “Oh gods, I have never done that before!” He said and Tarnack laughed.

“You could have fooled me beloved. Even though I felt how nervous you were you never let on.”

“I meant what I said, but still I’m used to books not public speaking.” Perdain chuckled and tossing the tin and brass wire into a rubbish pile.

“It’s in your blood love. How long until you think Fenderack knows?”

“Never. Those men are not likely to return to the city, they’ve been scared to death. If they do return they are either stupid or loyal until the brink of stupidity. Neither of which I suspect being the case. What was it I heard about you coming into the city?”

“I know, rumors often get blown out of proportion. It is romantic though to think I sailed in and whisked my lover away into the night.”

“Well you did, just not all the way into the city.”

“What’s a couple of leagues then?” Tarnack grinned leaning over to kiss Perdain and then take his hand.

“Come on, we were pulled out of bed for this and I’m suddenly in a good mood and hungry as a bear.” Tarnack said swinging Perdain’s hand as they walked.

“Aye, coffee is calling me.” Perdain chuckled as they joined the rest of their new friends to head back to the temple to eat.

“Perdain can I ask a dumb question?” Tarnack asked as they walked.

“I’ve never heard a dumb one from you yet beloved.” Perdain said walking hand in hand.

“I’m a country lad myself and city titles have always given me headaches. When a bloke like myself bonds to a Prince, what on earth happens then?”

Perdain chuckled. “You become Prince Consort my love. It’s a lovely title that indicates you rank above a lord because you bed the Prince.”

Tarnack laughed. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope. Lords have to have titles in the city and when a man comes along with none and ends up in a royal bed, they give him that one. It’s all politics really. You consort with me, hence the title.”

“How can one keep a straight face? Hello, I’m Tarnack and I just bonded and did lewd things in bed with Perdain, now give me a title? By the Gods it’s silly.”

“Yes. There I agree with you. Good thing I have no official titles anymore, you are free from Consort titles and are just my love and husband, Kings Own Tarnack.”

“Thank the Gods.” Tarnack said as they entered the temple and headed toward the stone table for the morning meal.

As Garth took in refugees as well as large groups of men coming to join the army in a matter of weeks men were erecting barracks in the fields while helping reap the harvest. People came in wagons full of provisions and weapons Wielder’s and Wellsprings by the score including their children who immediately went into the mountain temple for safety and under the care of Kassa and Rembrooke who had their hands full with twenty boys and girls under the age of ten and enjoying every minute of it.

All of the Wielder and Wellsprings, eighty pairs in all resided in the temple itself, twenty pairs still out in the field protecting the larger villages that were now dwindled of men and for a communication network so those forming the army would know if Fenderack made a move. They refused to let the people suffer and good solid pairs too old to fight but not too old to protect were enough to barricade a village in safety. All of the residents of smaller outskirt villages urged to go to county seats and gather together for safety during the war and help each other out during the winter months. No Traveling wielders and wellsprings could be spared and would not come as they always had in the past. This was War and they were needed to fight.

Five of the un-bonded wielder men and five un-bonded of age wellsprings soon found each other once everyone was together. Five of the ten wielder lads who had arrived still un-bonded and two of them non-breeders which meant their mates were in temples still but safe. The other three Perdain took aside and

gently informed them of the girls in the city, praying they had not been their intended matches, but indicating they may have been there was no way to tell, but always better to know the truth than not.

They understood and it fueled them against Fenderack. Those three very young men, hardly past their ranking merits would fight until they dropped.

When Ednack and Tarna arrived with all six of Tarnack's siblings it was a joyful family reunion. Perdain hadn't expected Tarnack's parents to be so young, knowing he had several siblings and he not being the eldest. Tarna just smiled and said Ednack was an old goat and plowed her early and often. She'd had her first at eighteen and her last at thirty, her youngest and only daughter was just thirteen and very evidently the apple of her father's eye and doted on by all six of her elder brothers. Tarnack was the second son and indeed looked like his mother as Rembrooke claimed. Rembrooke and Ednack were currently beating each other's backs in a firm hug and laughter filled the crowded main room of the temple as everyone reunited and gathered together finally en masse.

Perdain's jaw ached from smiling as his new extended family greeted him with sincere affection. Ednack literally picking him up and spinning him in a fierce hug, Tarna showering him with kisses, all of Tarnack's brothers trying to be the first to tell Perdain all of Tarnack's worst childhood follies and Edna had been attached to his side like an adoring little sister all through dinner. She and Tarnack the only ones to look the most like their mother and Perdain adored them all within minutes. Now he could see the people who'd made Tarnack the man he was, who had shaped his morals and values as a child and were his backbone of support.

More tables were brought in so everyone could be seated in the main temple hall, including the citizens appointed as leaders of their various groups and several of the monks. They were elbow to elbow but happily chattering away until Tarnack stood and called for attention by banging his spoon against a pewter plate.

He was smiling and all voices hushed to give him their attention. "First I'd like to take a minute and thank you all for coming so quickly. It looks like you've just beaten the first snows and it's been a cold journey for you all. Second, Perdain and I cannot express our joy at seeing all our ranks accounted for here and so very many men who made the journey here with you. As you know, these past three weeks have shaken Holst and brought it to its knees in addition to the past three years which lead us into this downward spiral. However, most of you have very little information as to what's been happening in the capitol these past few weeks so let us begin to fill in your missing blanks." Tarnack said picking up a sheaf of notes Perdain handed to him with a smile.

“Let me start at the beginning, according to Perdain’s accounts and the accounts of several witnesses. This began about eight months ago. Perdain noted several new regiments of men and mercenaries in Pernath. Traders indicated a boom in weapons and steel. About this time was when we saw even more drastic laws coming into force. The taxing of villages soaring, trade taxes doubling, more of the harvest being annexed by the crown, all our wellsprings losing all rights to their property and every copper cent being redirected to the crown treasury. We knew this was leading to something and Perdain predicted for years it was going to come down to Fenderack in the end. It seems his own son was not only hoodwinking Pendergar, but over half of the council was working with Fenderack on their own agenda. Father Rembrooke is handing out the list of names we’ve put together as those allied with Fenderack.” Tarnack said Rembrooke went table to table handing out parchments of notes Perdain had painstakingly put together and monks had copied to be given out to the men at this meeting.

“Perdain noted as we worked on these lists, it’s evident why these men ally with Fenderack. We’ve all had brushes with men who hate us on principle for our gifts and subsequent rank, and it’s compounded when dealing with ruling families who don’t have a trace of the gift in their bloodlines. Even in court a Wielder has final judgment over a lord when it comes to one word over another. These new laws are all designed for one purpose. They cannot take our gifts so they will take everything else we have. Our homes, our fields, our money, they will drive us into poverty and punish us financially out of nothing more than petty jealousy.”

“Then why ally with a wielder? It makes no sense.” One man said and Perdain stood.

“Fenderack is no wielder. He is a monster. Let me tell you all who Fenderack really is.” Perdain said standing to address the crowd.

“First I go back to the womb, where Fenderack not only took power from our mother, but from me his twin. As babes, mother had to separate us into separate cribs because I was suffocating he took so much. As children, when our parents were asleep Fenderack would sneak into my rooms at night and hold pillows over my head and in my terror my well would open and he’d take and only release me when I was at the brink of death. Older still he’d push me down stairs, leave broken glass on my floors and finally my mother caught him drowning me in the fountain. This when we were still only seven years old, what child is this malicious? My father said I went to the temple to study which was a lie. My mother took me to the temple in desperation to save my life. My father claimed Fenderack was only being a boy but my blessed mother knew better. This was not a matter of siblings fighting over a toy, this was Fenderack forcing my well open in terror to steal from it time and time again. He thrives on Chaos, lives on fear.” Perdain said meeting everyone’s eyes before continuing.

“It ends not here. Even in the temple I was not safe. During times of stress in the city when Wielders and Wellsprings were occupied fighting and when he wouldn’t be noticed, he’d tap into my wellspring during storms. Even though it is forbidden to use a wellspring under ten years old, he did anyway. He’d pull me into the node and not leave until I was raw and bleeding. He’d tell me in my mind that I was his and one day he’d not stop, but make me rouge and leave me a shell suited only for his needs. For years this continued and every time he’d use me I’d heal a littler larger than before. He knew this, he purposefully ripped me open larger and larger so eventually I’d be big enough for him to use and he’d be unstoppable.” Perdain said and a few gasps indicated a few had not known the extent of his abuse.

“I was not his only agenda. He had father’s ear and those men on the lists I gave you. There has never been a wellspring on the throne and he’d use that to sway them. Wellsprings are only bed toys to their wielders, power conduits and nothing more. Not fit to sit a throne. Brainless weak possessions fit only to serve their master wielders, worse are the male wellsprings. Objects of flesh lust only, unable to breed and only capable to satisfy carnal desires, unnatural, weak, freaks of nature, anathema!” Perdain slammed his fist down on the table.

“Finally the excuse my father needed to rid himself of his wellspring son, his shame. These beliefs he’d always harbored, reinforced by Fenderack and echoed by the lords. So they curse not one but all of us! Had I not been born this law would have never come to pass and I will bear that burden on my heart for as long as I draw breath. My only crime being born male and now countless others now share this curse with me. This was the catalyst of more that followed, it opened the doors for the lords to push through the other wellspring laws and place Fenderack into the line of succession as their more masculine figurehead as opposed to the Wellspring’s nature to be smaller. A visual illusion of prowess needs to be on the throne. Fenderack is that. Always larger, always taller and last I saw of him already man height at thirteen. Like our father he was and is. Better suited to look the part of a King than I. However, a snake they chose and put into the position he’d always worked for. With me out of the way, nothing was going to stop him and oh how he gloated to me that night in my mind. Promising me a future at his side as his wellspring slave, chained to the tower node to be used at his will with me unable to refuse him by law. Promising me that no wielder would ever be allowed to bond to me and that he was already building a barrier around the temple that would alert him if someone did try to bond to me. He promised me a lifetime alone, a rouge prison and that I belonged to no one but him.” Perdain said and visibly shivered and Tarnack took his hand and smiled.

Perdain smiled back and continued. “For many weeks I was lost in fear until I received my first letter from Tarnack. Giving me hope where before I had none. Giving me focus and purpose and a way to fight back even though confined to

the temple and Giving me his ring to protect me from Fenderack's malice." Perdain said turning loving eyes to Tarnack.

"Over the years we exchanged many letters and many hours were spent fighting a common enemy from different fronts. Tarnack in amongst the people and I watching and gathering information and sending it to Tarnack. This leads us to three weeks ago, when the heartbeat of the city stopped and the gates of hell opened. My parents lay dead, murdered by their son, the hired soldiers in the streets setting fires and killing people as they fled, and I was rocked by the nodes in the city going rouge one after the other and running. First down the catacombs of the temple into the sewers, then into the cold River and then into a warmth that made me so very complete. For years I had loved the man whose letters filled my soul with hope, whose words gave me strength and I knew I didn't need a bond to tell me I loved him, he didn't need to touch my well for me to know I was bonded to him already. But touch he did and for the first time in my life I knew what true joy was." Perdain said turning to Tarnack to lay a small hand against his cheek.

"I follow you Tarnack because you are light in the darkness for so many, you are strength for those in need, truth in the lies, courage against the odds and have shown time and again true faith in the Gods Will above. I stand with you not because of our bond, but because of who you are. I am just overly blessed to have you as my husband too." Perdain added and Tarnack just kissed his hand and stood.

"You forget your own merits that made me vow to serve you. Whose wisdom and insights has led me safely all these years? You don't follow Perdain you lead my love. It was you who gave me the secrets of the temple roads, the hidden sanctuaries to hide in and the maps to these hidden temples. It was you who had spies in every council session to warn me of actions being taken against me, to forecast troubles I may have encountered and who with the aide of our brothers of the faith kept me warm and fed and alive. I could not have done anything without you. You kept me safe and able to continue, you kept me informed with truth, you were the one staying sleepless at night researching and working while I slept. I cannot take credit for work that was done in your name and honor beloved. I was merely your voice and messenger." Tarnack said turning to face the crowd.

"There is more about Perdain you must know, the very depths of his strength that has left even myself in awe. Right after we arrived, Perdain felt a disturbance in the city and yes I do mean Pernath. Unbelievable range he has for a wellspring. Two hundred leagues and he felt a cry for help. This will hammer home to you the depths of Fenderack's madness and why he must be stopped. Perdain felt a wellspring, a child calling for help and what he found turns by blood cold. Fenderack had five unmatched wellsprings in the palace and the child was being tortured and raped and was screaming for help as her well was being forced

rouge. Perdain, along with Caery and Mundy who piggy-backed on his reach through the ley lines managed to reach the rouge node under the palace and spared the child the madness of going rouge and called her well away and dissipated her light into the land. The other girls bore witness and saw their own fates and their lights extinguished by their own hands. We lost five wellsprings and it is a sad day when a man forces these girls into slavery and would taint them rouge to suit his own ends. Sadder days when fellow wellsprings must kill a child to spare her torture and urge other wellsprings to suicide to escape. None of our wellsprings are safe. If he can obtain un-bonded wellsprings under their father's noses he'll not stop there. He'll take your wives and husbands too and keep you both alive in torture and turn you rouge if he can. He is pure evil and we cannot let him reach beyond the city. Come spring we march to Pernath and take back the city and Kill Fenderack before all of Holst is tainted with his corruption." Tarnack said and there was banging of tankards and shouts of affirmation all across the room. When Ednack stood and held up his hand.

"Once there, I make a motion the rightful heir is placed on the throne. I too have spent years in correspondence with His Highness Perdain and I'd follow you to hell and back as my King! Damn tradition of only a wielder on the throne! Wellsprings are just as capable in my book. Hell what man here can say he's not bested by his wellspring more often than not in logic? It doesn't take brute force to lead, it takes the mind of a leader! All in favor that Perdain is our true King say Aye!"

The deafening "AYE!" that shook the stones took the strength out of Perdain's knees and he sat in his chair stunned. He really had not expected this and Tarnack just smiled at him.

"I told you love, we all stand behind you, you are our King." Tarnack said as he sat next to Perdain and held his hand.

"I can only promise to try if you all believe in me so much." Perdain said and Tarnack smiled.

"Aye love. All of us can only try." He said holding up his glass and shouting. "LONG LIVE THE TRUE KING PERDAIN!"

Which was echoed repeatedly like a wave throughout the temple.

“A Prince’s Destiny”
A Wielder and Wellspring Story
 Author: D. Sanders
Act VI - The People’s King

That night as they readied for bed Perdain looked troubled as he turned down the covers. “Perdain, talk to me dearest. Something is wrong.” Tarnack said as he tossed his clothes over a chair before crawling into their shared bed.

“Remember when I said illusions are important? They really are Tarnack. You and the other wielders and wellsprings can see the situation from a shared viewpoint. We all know wellsprings are small externally it’s nature and you can’t measure a wellspring’s power with the eyes. It’s all well and good you all shouting to put me on the throne. The people and Lords however, regardless of what I do or do not do when all is said and done what they see will weigh heavily on their judgment.” Perdain sighed as his clothes joined Tarnack’s on the chair and his small form slipped into bed.

“What are you getting at Love?”

“There’s a reason never spoken or written but understood why a wellspring has never been King. First very much the illusion, we don’t particularly give the illusion of strength to carry a kingdom. We look frail and delicate and how many times do common folk think a wellspring is sickly when we’re not. Secondly and stated more than once in my hearing when I was a child. I’m not likely to produce an heir am I? That’s another thing that will cause discord.”

“There have been non-breeders on the throne before.”

“But always the wielder as King and not the wellspring. They choose an heir from the next in line of the immediate family then. You double the worry when it’s the wellspring as King. I could spend hours discussing a point with someone and have them argue for the sake of arguing. However, let Rembrooke walk in, a much larger man and say word for word what I had been saying for hours and no one disputes him. It’s imagery, illusion I look like a push over and my body must reflect my mind and people will always look just at the surface, I’ve seen it time and again love.”

“Really?”

“Aye. Had I been the one out here holding meetings Tarnack, even using the same words we would not have half the support you managed to persuade and gain. People see in you strength and power it’s in your voice, your body, and your conviction. You are an entire package and people trust with their eyes as much with their ears. The more logical choice of King would be you Tarnack.”

“I’m no bloody King! I don’t know a salad fork from a dinner fork. I can sheer sheep and milk goats, politics leaves me floundering love.”

“But you’d learn and I would be there with you remember. The wellspring in his proper place. It’s illusion Tarnack it gives comfort and trust. Don’t forget either, my titles are lost by law that is still written and I’ve said before will be almost impossible to revoke. Even if I were on the throne. It’s logic dearest. I would serve the people better at your side, supporting you openly as King. We’ll make larger strides this way. I’m serious Tarnack, you should be King in my stead. The one the people already call the Gods Outlaw. You’re a hero to them, they’d follow any banner you raise.”

“You’ve been thinking about this a long time haven’t you beloved?”

“Aye. Since before we bonded and you are capable, more than capable. You would not be the first commoner Wielder to take the throne from another as People’s choice. It hasn’t happened in centuries, but it has before.”

“I can’t accept without discussing this with everyone first Perdain. This is a lot to think about beloved. I’ve never even considered before and don’t really know if I want to at all. I can see your logic and I’m not disputing that I can see you’re right. I’m just not sure if I’m the best man for the job.”

“You are dearest, and that’s proof right there.” Perdain said turning to nestle into Tarnack’s arms.

“You have that much faith in me?” Tarnack asked and Perdain just kissed his chest and held him close.

“Aye. The Gods light shines in you Tarnack. I see it every day I am with you beloved.” He sighed and Tarnack lay back and brought his arms around Perdain and held him close.

“I told you before, if I shine it’s because of you.” Tarnack said rolling Perdain to his back and further discussion on the matter gave way to more pressing matters of the heart.

Olsgruth watched Fenderack pace his office angrily fuming. “What do you mean they never returned?”

“My riders are missing sire. Probably taken by were-beasts on the journey, a large track of the road heads through the forest between here and Garth.”

“Did you contact the watchtower in Garth to see if they arrived?”

“Aye sire and no response. No response from any of the watchtowers now. Our communication is cut off from the rest of the Kingdom no one is responding to the city.”

“Send a regiment to Garth, reestablish the watchtower there then leave soldiers to man it then continue on to Haversmead.”

“Sire, the snows are already falling, it’s suicide to send foot soldiers out in winter. Especially without a Wielder for protection against the beasts and elements. We have no wielders left in the city, they have all abandoned their posts. It’s sending good men to slaughter needlessly and weakening your defenses. I’d recommend strengthening the city first, you sire are our only wielder here. You will be taxed enough managing the city alone, you need your men to keep order and protect the borders. If Perdain is still alive he will be gathering forces to march against you in spring. That is basic tactics of war.”

“Perdain is meek as a fly.”

“But Tarnack is not and we already know he and the Prin... he and Perdain were working together with the Rebellion. Sire I would not underestimate the power Tarnack has behind him. He is a very real foe and you are unexpectedly in a very weakened position. Fortify against them sire, be prepared to face them directly come spring.”

“As much as I detest your words, they are logical and I will consider them. Leave me now to think.” Fenderack said dismissing his general and Olsgurth breathed a sigh of relief that the King listened for once and he headed to the pub for a stiff drink.

“Olsgurth, not seen you much around as of Late.” Rusgard said as Olsgurth pulled up a stool.

“Tired of babysitting the petulant King I am. May not Look sixteen, but sure has the mind of one. Wanted me to send out men he did in this weather, let him walk two hundred leagues in cold with hungry were beasties!” Olsgurth sighed and Rusgard nodded.

“Most lords never had a day in the army in their lives. They don’t know what men like us go through for their whims and a measly copper to give the wife and kids at the end of the day.” Rusgard said, his own face lined with scars from an early military career and a mercenary before he lost his lower leg in a battle and now he ran the pub and his wooden peg of a leg made a distinctive thump on the floor as he walked.

“Rus, you and I fought years ago as mercs and I trust you and would have you at my back any day. Had I known what I was walking into, I would not have taken this gods forsaken job. Tell me anything you know mate, I don’t want my men slaughtered and all I need is an excuse to ride out of here.” Olsгурth said and Rusgard sighed.

“Ollie, let me be frank. I’d have packed up my horse and headed out weeks ago if I was you. Look at your horses how they buck and shy at simple noises they are trained not to spook over. Have you seen a dog or cat in the city in weeks? There’s badness here my friend. My sources tell me all the city nodes are rouge and we just ain’t seein’ it cause laddy wearing his papa’s crown got ‘em blocked. He’s more than a bad egg Ollie, he’s mad and evil as can be. He ain’t no wielder, he’s a rogue. Cut yer losses and fly friend.”

“What do ya mean Rouge Rus?”

“I mean just that. He’s like a wielder in reverse. Uses taint to work with. Look at this city man for gods sake. What real wielder can live in this muck? They’d all be going mad and working themselves raw to fix this and what does his majesty do? Taxes us more, takes our girls and they never come out again and just sits there like he just got his favorite toy and hadn’t figured out how to use it yet. He just kills, rapes and steals. You ever known a wielder to act like that?”

“No, seen ‘em kill a few rotten men like that though. They judge rough handed they do at times.”

“But always fair, and the ones they kill took a lot more lives before they was caught and sentenced. True you and I had a fair few misses when we was younger with wielders on our tails. But we was running for a reason. How many laws did we break? Quite a few. Can’t hold the law against the man doing his job just like we was a doin’ ours. You get to talkin’ with wielders and they’re just like us mate. Like the same beer, laugh at the same jokes, live rougher lives than ever you an I did. Most have nothing but the clothes on their backs out there working for a meal and a bed and most nights not even getting anything more than a hayshed to drop heads in but they work just the same they do, just like the rest of us and they’re hurting worse than we are right now.”

“How tell?”

“Oh man you ain’t dumb Ollie. Look at them laws they’ve been passin’! It don’t take an idiot to figure out its highway robbery masked under lordly gibberish. First puttin’ all those boy wellsprings under lock and key. Takin’ ‘em from parents and fining the parents for not givin’ up their children and then makin’ ‘em traitors if they fight back. Take my damn son from me and I’ll lop your gods damn head off if you try. All done just to get Perdain off bein’ next in line. Then they don’t stop there. Make all the lady wellsprings rich and poor give up everything they owned

before bonding. Driven into poverty and dumped on their ears to fill our pockets. That's money out of babes mouths that is. Blood money. I ain't never met a wellspring in my life not damn bloody smart and who wouldn't give you everything they had anyway to help you. They attacked wielders and wellsprings right off the bat. You know tactics mate, that's weakening the enemy!"

"S'truth, simple tactics that is. Weaken your worst opposition and then seize. What the bloody hell am I still doing here? Come spring we're going to have every damn wielder and wellspring at the city gates and any soldier foolish enough to still be here is a dead man!" Olsgruth said and Rusgard smiled.

"Bout time you came around to the right side of thinkin' my old friend. I knew you would, just waited until the right time. Come with me." Rusgard said leading Olsgruth in the back room and shut the door.

"Now you want a better job? Don't pay nothing but pride mind you."

"All my best jobs came from you Rus. I'm all ears, I'm not letting my men get slaughtered for the brat. This is Breech of Bloody contract it is. He's using my men as pawns!"

"Good. Winter or not you'd best go and there's the right army you should be fighting with camped out at Garth. You're right, every wielder and wellspring, every monk, and fifty thousand men strong waiting until first thaw. It will be a slaughter here in Spring. All the citizens already know what's coming and will take sanctuary when the bells ring the charge. Any soldier left will be considered the enemy and they are going to march over us like ants on a picnic. A whole regiment cannot fight one un-bonded wielder and win, think what eighty bonded pairs together signifies."

"Corpses. How do you know all this?"

"Ollie, just because I lost my leg, you don't think I quit doing jobs do you? I've been working the rebellion lines for years now mate. Don't pay a lot, but I'm getting old and my soul is a bit more important to me now than it was. I like to think for once I'm fighting the good fight because I can and not because someone paid me to mate."

"You old goat, and me too now I suppose. I'm tired of serving bastards and hating myself at night. Gods man you should see what that bastard does to little girls it makes me sick!"

"Then get out friend. You can't kill him and don't try. Leave that to the wielders, just get your men out and go as fast as you can. I'll send word to Tarnack and

His Highness Perdain you're coming so they won't welcome you with lightening." Rusgard said and Olsgurth laughed.

"I bloody knew you would have known where Tarnack was. You're information is always the best. Tell me, cause now I just have to know more that the bastard doesn't. Are Tarnack and Perdain bonded?" Olsgurth asked and Rusgard grinned.

"Aye mate."

"Then I am definitely not sticking around. I already know from Fenderack's belly aching how strong they both were individually, no way in hell I'm facing that. Thank you friend, you saved my life again it seems."

"You saved mine a time or two when we was younger and you let me marry your sister without lopping my balls off. My sons thank you." Rusgard said with a wink and Olsgurth laughed.

"Where are your boys?"

"Already in Garth. They'll meet their uncle there."

"Good. I'm out of here tomorrow then, going to round my men up tonight. Fenderack already wanted us to go to Garth and I called it suicide. I'll suddenly change my mind for him so he won't suspect. It is suicide to travel but more so to stay. Farewell Rus, keep the fires burning."

"Safe travel. I'll let them know you're coming and see if I can't get an escort to ride out and meet you." Rusgard said sitting down to pen the letter and Olsgurth was out of the door and waking his men in the barracks.

"Get up all of you! Muster everyone from our troop and any one else who'll follow us from the standing army, we're getting out of hell." Olsgurth said waking his sergeant first and then heading to the King.

"What is it Olsgurth?" Fenderack demanded, half dressed with a young girl tied in his bed.

"Sire, I've reconsidered my advice to you. I think a hard march and first strike are better tactics and I'm taking my men now before the snows get any deeper. I'll lead them myself and we'll get Garth for you and send up the watchtower when we arrive. I'm not sitting waiting like a sissy for them. The element of surprise is always best."

"Good. Now go I'm busy." Fenderack said and Olsgurth bowed and tried not to laugh at Fenderack's utter stupidity as he practically ran to his rooms. He took

everything he could get his hands on. Especially money, months worth of pay for his men. Which was his right to commander as General. He'd have to pay his men after all, he wasn't going to make them starve too. He had a wagon loaded with crates of coppers, provisions, tents and all the weapons he could gather and then met his men. Most of the royal army right beside hired mercs.

"I'll explain once we're out of the city. March men!" Olsgurth said and men and horses all headed out of the city.

Once everyone was a good distance from the city and their horses had immediately calmed Olsgurth called a halt and had them gather.

"It's a suicide march lads I know. But guaranteed death if we stay in that gods forsaken city. We struggle now to live and we go to join another army. Fenderack serves Fenderack! I refuse to let you all get run down like chickens to the fry pan! We go now before the snows get too deep and if we push hard we can Make Garth in five days. Four if we do not rest until we are falling over. Take off your colors! We are now part of the People's Army! The pay isn't as good, but who can measure the worth of your lives? I for one would like mine a little longer. Let's march!" Olsgurth said and the cheers from his men indicated he'd made the right choice and so they headed east.

Tarnack read the letter he'd fetched from the city temple and his cheers and laughter from his room woke everyone still sleeping, including Perdain who shot out of bed startled to land naked and twisted in bed linens on the floor. "What?" He asked fighting free of blankets to come over to Tarnack who was jumping around the room only to swing Perdain into his arm and dance.

"Only the very best news we've had yet! Read!" Tarnack said and as Perdain read his eyes widened in shock and then joy and his own laughter now filled the room and they both hurried to dress and were banging on doors to rouse everyone with the news.

Everyone was bleary eyed and Kassa was wearing Rembrooke's robe around him and holding it on so it didn't fall off again and Rembrooke was only in a nightshirt as they stumbled in with everyone else.

"Sorry to wake everyone, but we just got fabulous news that could not wait. Fenderack's army has deserted him and are on their way here to join us!"

"WHAT?" Rembrooke said fully awake now with everyone else.

"Rusgard apparently goes way back with the General Fenderack hired. Olsgurth is his name, he was a hired merc who didn't realize the mess he was getting his

men into. He's called breach of contract, putting his men too at risk and he's packed them all up, including any of the royal army who'd follow and they're pushing in a suicide march to get here knowing it was guaranteed slaughter to stay. Fenderack is defenseless and has no idea yet. The citizens are already drilled to go to the temple when the time comes and hide in the catacombs when they see us coming. Lads, this is it, as little bloodshed as possible as we've all hoped!" Tarnack said turning to Perdain whose smile was so bright it lit up the room.

"We need fast riders who can go meet them and help bring them in. They are out there unprotected and armies never march without wielders. Thomus and Rindi I know you both have horsemanship training are you fast?"

"I can ride a broke back mare and win a race. Been in the saddle since I was born!" Rindi said and Thomus grinned.

"Same here, Can ride 'em and shoe 'em" Thomus winked and saluted.

Tarnack smiled. "Anyone else fast riders?"

"Count Mundy and I in, we bonded in the damn saddle racing!" Pavel said and Tarnack nodded.

"Excellent, go eat, dress warm. Everyone pull together to get them travel kits ready and someone scare them up and saddle them some horses!" Tarnack ordered and everyone flew into action and Perdain just sat amused and Tarnack turned and quirked an eyebrow.

"What?" He asked and Perdain just grinned.

"Just admiring natural leadership skills is all." Was all Perdain said as he bowed his head in obvious respect to a superior and Tarnack was no fool and understood the double meaning behind his words and body language. Perdain's point made from the night before quite eloquently, he was already acting like a King and hadn't realized it himself until just that moment.

Perhaps Perdain was right, it still would take a lot of thinking about, but Perdain had never lead him astray before and doubted he would now. He'd trust Perdain's wisdom as he'd always done and follow his infinitely wiser council.

Two days out of the city Olsgurth's men were breaking morning camp when the sounds of heavy hooves riding hard coming from the east alerted them and Olsgurth drew his sword but waited to see what would happen.

Four riders pulled up all four heavily cloaked from the cold and all four cloaks bearing wielder and wellspring patches.

“Hail friends! We’re here to escort you in for Tarnack and Perdain. I’m Wielder Pavel and this is my Bonded Wellspring Mundy and Wielder Thomus and his Bonded Wellspring Rindi. We’re here to offer protection and try to generate a shield of heat around you while you march. Mundy and I will lead and Thomus and Rindi will take up the rear.” Pavel said and Olsгурth sheathed his sword and held up his hand to Pavel to shake.

“How on earth did you get here so fast?” Olsгурth asked and Thomas laughed.

“Made it a bloody race we done, not had a good ride like that in ages.” Thomas winked and Pavel laughed.

“Travel a lot faster too when just four without foot soldiers speed. There is no need to push so hard now. We can buffer the worst of the elements for you.” Pavel said as Rindi and Thomus trotted past the soldiers still gearing up to take up flank behind the wagon to wait until they were on the move again. Thomus making a link with Pavel to establish a barrier and the sighs from the men were audible as the frigid air began to warm inside the invisible dome with their own body heat.

Camp was broken down in record time with experienced military men and mercenaries and the army pushed eastward in higher spirits having the wielders and wellsprings riding point guard for protection and keeping the men warm as they did so.

They made Garth by the middle of the Fifth day and the army paused at the entrance of the small city as two figures strode forward and the General dismounted and walked to greet them.

The tall wielder and his wellspring were dressed in rough fabrics but elegantly cut and both in a rich vermilion shade. The wielder was darkest blond and around his brow a circlet of gold and to his side his smaller companion was dark in beauty in comparison to the fair wielder. His dark sable hair loose and tumbling in thick waves over his shoulders to the middle of his back, his kind grey-blue and large eyes as serene as his smile. On his brow a matching circlet of silver. Olsгурth was in no doubt who these two were and he bowed respect. He would have never expected Perdain to be so unlike his twin in appearance nor to see such compassion in his gaze when Fenderack’s eyes held nothing but malice.

“Welcome to you all, it does ours hearts joy to see you safely delivered.” Tarnack said as he walked forward in unison with Perdain who was silently coaching him

telepathically how to act. They'd already had a long council with the other wielders and wellsprings and it had been decided unanimously to accept Perdain's abdication in favor of Tarnack. Now he was training Tarnack how to be a king in the more mundane sense of protocol and formal speech.

"I am Tarnack and beside me is His Former Royal Highness Prince Perdain of Holst. My Bonded Wellspring and Husband. We wish you welcome General Olsgurth and welcome you into our People's Army, your former position retained and we would wish to speak with you on formal matters as soon as your men are safely installed into their barracks. Bring with you your most trusted men and we will break bread together as allies." Tarnack said holding out his hand and Olsgurth clasped it and smiled.

"Now that's a REAL King my lads!" Olsgurth bellowed and smiled. "You honor us I'll will come within the hour. Men! Make Camp!" He turned and ordered and men cheered as Tarnack and Perdain stepped aside and let them pass the city gates nodding and smiling to the men who passed by, wanting to get a good look at the famed outlaw Tarnack and the beautiful and mysterious Prince Perdain.

::See, I told you Tarnack, you doubted me and you did well.::

::Stop, you'll make me laugh Dain. It's hard enough keeping a straight face with you having me all dolled up like this. How do you wear these things on your head? It's giving me a headache in this cold.::

::You'll survive Tar. You get used to them after a while.::

::Unlikely. On you it looks nice on me I keep thinking it's going to slip off.::

::Oh do stop belly aching Dearest. It's all part of the illusion and you know it. Seen to be a King, act like a King, followed like a King, we've been over this already.::

::I know, I know. You can take the boy out of the sheep shed....::

::And train him table manners... eventually.::

::You wound me love.::

::Then why are you smiling dearest?: Perdain said turning his eyes briefly to Tarnack and Tarnack smiled and just continued standing there until the last man was formally welcomed in to Garth.

Tarnack and Perdain turned and followed Thomus and Rindi inside as the gates shut behind them and arm in arm they walked back to the temple and once inside Tarnack heaved a sigh of relief and his mother chuckled.

“Son, you’ll learn. Like riding a horse I suspect.”

“Thank the Gods I have Perdain speaking in my head right now so I don’t fumble all over the place.” Tarnack said and Perdain just reached over and took off Tarnack’s circlet and kissed his bare brow.

“You did just fine dearest.” Perdain said setting the circlet on the table and placing his own on top. “Truth be told, they give me a headache too. You only have to wear them in public and on formal occasions.” Perdain said flopping into a chair and pouring them both mugs of hot coffee to warm them from the cold outside.

“In other words all the bloody time out here right?”

“Aye love. This is considered public.” Perdain winked and handed Tarnack his mug.

Tarnack just groaned and drank.

Olsgurth arrived with his sergeant within the hour as he’d said he would and Rembrooke led them into the temple to the main stone table where Tarnack now sat at the head with Perdain to his immediate right. Both circlets were back on since this was a formal occasion and Tarnack stood to clasp Olsgurth’s hand as he was seated to the King’s left. “Welcome General, I trust your journey was without incident?”

“It would have been had you not sent such a fine escort your majesty. My men suffered little more than sore feet which is to be expected on such a march. Thank you for your concern.”

“I know the road General and I have the saddle sores to prove it.” Tarnack said and Olsgurth laughed.

“I don’t doubt that Sire. Let me just state for the record I never want to have to try and track you again Sire. Harder to catch than a were weasel loose in your britches.” Olsgurth winked, he was a good man with a very long military and mercenary career behind him and it showed in his very bearing. Tarnack laughed.

“I had a few secrets general that aided me in hiding from your men. You can credit my elusiveness to my dear bonded. It was his direction keeping me under your noses, let not his looks fool you, never a more strategic mind you’re likely to

find General.” Tarnack said as they were both seated again and Olsgurth took a good look at the Prince.

“I learned a long time ago Sire, never to judge a book by it’s cover. Often times they are most misleading. It is an honor to meet you at last Your Highness.”

“The honor is mine General. The news of your coming was most joyous to us to hear and we do welcome you with our hearts filled with gratitude.” Perdain smiled and Olsgurth was taken again by the sheer magnitude of the differences in the twins. Perdain spoke with a light air that evoked calm and sincerity. His eyes always made eye contact and his smile genuine. His words chosen carefully and his speech flawless in manners. He was royalty from the ends of his shining hair to the tips of his fingers resting lightly and folded on the table. His poise, his posture, the gentle nod of his head everything about him the complete opposite of his twin.

“Might I speak openly your Highness?” Olsgurth asked and Perdain nodded.

“I wish you would General, I prefer open discourse.” Perdain said and Olsgurth smiled.

“This coming from a father to two boys myself, as much as I admired your good father when he first came to the throne, I cannot see how he could be so blind to his own children. The differences between you and your brother make me want to weep and go back in time and clout that man in the head, hard.”

“It would have done little good General. You have probably only seen one side of Fenderack. When young and in our father’s presence he was most capable of fooling sometimes even me into thinking he had changed.” Perdain sighed and Olsgurth nodded.

“He was like that when he contracted us. He seemed eager, but I chalked that up to his youth and all our papers were signed and sealed by King Pendergar, so we didn’t question anything. That night when Fenderack murdered your good parents, I had no idea what was happening in the Palace. My men were stationed in the stockyard, and we’d been told there was a Rebellion gathering and that as the standing army flushed them, we were to cut them down. There is a black stain on my heart when I realized it was citizens being flushed from their homes and when my officers realized too we pulled a retreat. The Standing army was not flushing anything, they’d been stationed on the West End same as us with the same orders. We’d done been both hoodwinked. No one was left in the Palace proper and when I rode back I found Fenderack sittin’ on your father’s throne and a second band of mercs, bloody private butchers had been hired directly by Fenderack to oust the lords and set the fires. He gave me two options, stay in my position as his General or he’d appoint a new one over my men and

be done with me. I've been looking for a way out for months. I'd not abandon my men."

"No leader ever leaves his men to suffer." Tarnack said and Olsгурth nodded.

"It gets worse Sire. I thought in my mind that once the boy had his papa's crown he'd be like every other usurper to the throne and appoint a new council of his choosing of his own supporters and everything eventually falls back into order. However, he disbanded them all and only meets with his supporters one on one. No one, not even I know what they discuss behind closed doors. Those times not very often either mind you, I know not what Fenderack is after, he spends all his time either being a right depraved bastard with little ones that turn my blood cold, or he's up in the tower of the palace alone muttering to himself."

"I can explain the muttering. He's placing barriers on his nodes in the city so we can't try to tap in to clean them. We already know about his disgusting habits first hand. We lost five of our wellsprings to that monster."

"So it was your highness who spared the girl?" Olsгурth asked and Perdain nodded solemnly.

"Aye, and I pray to the gods I never hear a child cry out like that again and I pray I am never again faced with the choice of leading a child to her death in order to spare her soul." Perdain said and Tarnack just laid his hand atop Perdain's.

"Beloved, you did what was best for her in the end. Take comfort in that." Tarnack said and Perdain just nodded once, it was evident it still weighed heavily on his soul.

"Aye your Highness. If it is any comfort. All the girls had peaceful faces in the end." Olsгурth said and Perdain smiled sadly.

"Aye, it does. Thank you General." Perdain said as Rembrooke and Kassa came in the room escorting Ednack and Tarna, Pavel and Mundy, and Yancy and Caery into the room to join the meeting.

"General, these are my most trusted friends and closest Confidences. My Father, Wielder Ednack and mother Wellspring Tarna. Father's Rembrooke and Kassa, Wielders Pavel and Yancy and their Wellsprings Mundy and Caery. We've all spent many months working together and they have agreed to be at your disposal to help organize the men and get the regiments paired with working bonded pairs." Tarnack said and Olsгурth stood and shook all their hands.

"It's always a pleasure to work side by side with Bonded pairs. My Sergeant Denus here is the master of the lists, he knows everyone down to the last travel

cook and fresh faced rookie. He'll help match skill to skill with you." Olsgurth said and Ednack shook his hand.

"As I know our ranks with Pavel and Yancy. We'll make sure all our men and women are paired with the best chances of success and compatibility. We've got a side room here available to work over dinner Denus if you'd join us we can get to work right away and get these men into troops to begin drilling as teams." Ednack said and Denus looked relieved.

"Splendid! I have my lists with me and no time like the present to get started." Denus said following the wielders and wellsprings into small library with a large map table and food waiting and they shut the door behind them to start working.

"You just made Denus' evening. He'd rather be drilling in ten foot of snow and sleet than sit through a formal dinner." Olsgurth said and Tarnack grinned.

"He's not the only one." Tarnack winked and Olsgurth laughed heartily. Perdain just smiled at the slip of protocol. With men like Olsgurth, humor and straightforward honesty worked best anyway. Tarnack's forte.

Rembrooke and Kassa took up seats and Tarnack turned to them. "I believe you already know Father Rembrooke. Our spokesman for the Brotherhood of the Faith." Tarnack indicated Rembrooke and Olsgurth nodded.

"Aye. It is a pleasure to meet you under the same banner Father." Olsgurth bowed his head in respect to a man of the faith and Rembrooke returned the courtesy.

"It is that General. The gods smile at such tidings." He responded as Tarnack turned to Kassa.

"Father Kassa is our most accomplished healer and surgeon. He has offered his services to all the men and he's already put together a team of other healers who have come from the villages. When your men are in need General, look for anyone wearing a white armband. They are part of Kassa's healing crew."

"That's a blessing to know. Father Kassa we are in short supply of healers. We only have one and he is always over burdened. Healer Issari is with us and I'll send him to you for instruction." Olsgurth said and Kassa smiled.

"I've already found him General and we've already had a nice chat. I have him installed in the temple in Garth with the other healers rather than in the barracks. It's wise to keep all the healer's together so we are easily found in emergencies. He's already taken care of." Kassa said with a genial smile and Olsgurth laughed.

"Monks, always bloody efficient." Olsgurth said and Kassa laughed.

“We try to be.” Kassa said standing again. “Now if you gentlemen will please excuse me, there are a few men in need of simple blister relief and I have a kettle of ointment brewing. No rest for healers. Good evening.” Kassa said leaving just Rembrooke, Perdain, Tarnack and Olsgurth around the table.

Two young novice monks came in with serving carts full of simple but warm fare and began to dish up the dinner off the trays and bring in warm mulled wine and cider to go with the lamb and new potatoes in mint sauce. Once the meal was served Father Rembrooke stood and the other’s bowed their heads for a blessing.

“We thank the Gods for their blessings upon us. For leading us to new friendships and for guiding our paths together. By your Will be break bread tonight united in the Faith. Equals on the common road to peace and may we never stray from your light. In the Gods names we say Blessed Be All Under the Heavens.”

“Blessed be All.” All three echoed as Rembrooke sat again and light discussion continued over the meal.

“General I beg a rather sad boon of you.” Perdain asked quietly, his eyes pained.

“Anything Highness.” Olsgurth said feeling his old steely heart lurch with the look of pain in Perdain’s eyes.

“I do not know what happened to my Parents. I beg you tell me my mother suffered not.” He said fighting tears, he had yet to grieve her and it was getting harder and harder to push it aside. The not knowing what had befallen her hurt worst of all.

“You can rest easier highness. Your good mother was asleep and felt no pain so I understand with bonds. Your father did not suffer either, it was poison in his dinner wine.”

“Thank the gods.” Perdain said a single tear rolling down his cheek and Tarnack reached up to wipe it away.

“Dearest you have not grieved nor given yourself permission to do so. It is long past time you allow yourself to mourn her loss.” Tarnack said and Perdain just stiffened and shook off his upset.

“She would not want me too when so much needs to be done beloved. I mourn her always in my heart.” Perdain said recovering his composure and Olsgurth once again had to reevaluate his view on the Prince. Beautiful and delicate as eggshells on the outside and strong as steel on the inside. Unlike Fenderack,

Perdain looked his age, almost younger considering his diminutive frame or if one failed to see the maturity in his eyes or hear it in his words. It was amazing that a lad not yet sixteen could carry himself like a man twice his senior. Perdain was ageless, like fine wine. He was compassion and tenderness mixed with fierce conviction and steadfast faith.

Olsgurth got up and walked around Tarnack's chair and knelt by Perdain's feet. "In all my life Highness, I have never been moved enough to say what I am about to say to you. I give you my solemn vow to give you both my sword and my honor. Never have I met a man who can face the burdens you have done and still retain such unshakable faith and courage. The gods strike me down if I ever willingly or unwillingly betray you. The Gods light shines in you and I know your Good mother must be very proud of you Highness. I will serve you both until my dying days." Olsgurth said and Perdain's resolved cracked like glass as he took Olsgurth's hand in both of his tightly and for the first time even in Tarnack's presence, he cried for himself and his own personal emotions. Truly cried and purged the pain, purged the torment, purged his loss and purged his sorrow. He had only cried once in Tarnack's presence and that had been over the child wellspring and his tears had been for her and her death. This was the first time Perdain had allowed himself personal emotional release.

Tarnack stood and walked around Perdain's chair and laid a tender hand on his hair and after a few minutes Rembrooke walked over and handed him a napkin to dry his eyes. "Forgive me, I am so very sorry." Perdain said wiping his eyes and Olsgurth just smiled and reached up with another napkin to catch the last stray tear that fell, like a grandfather would to a favorite grandchild.

"Naught to Forgive you for Highness. I feel as protective over you as I would my own kin. There's nothing I would not do for you, you have restored my faith in all that is still good in this world. I will see you both on the throne if it takes my last breath. Holst will only prosper under your hands. I pray you will ever feel comfortable with me in your confidence as I am ever in yours. You've freed my very soul." Olsgurth said and Perdain just smiled, his eyes shining with his lingering tears.

"That I can vow in return gladly. Friends are priceless." Perdain said and Olsgurth nodded.

"Aye, they are indeed." He said standing and holding out his hand to Tarnack.

"I hope you don't mind another sword at your side in keeping such light safe Sire."

"Olsgurth my friend, it gives me confidence and much peace of mind. So let us end this formal gathering and continue as equals and friends. Please when we are alone in confidence address me as Tarnack. Truth be told I detest the titles."

Tarnack said taking off his circlet and tossing it on the table and Olsgurth chuckled.

“I could tell lad. You’re a lone soldier and once a common man, always one. You get to be one of the few I let call me Ollie and get away with it.” Olsgurth winked and Perdain chuckled between them, taking off his circlet as a sign of informality and setting his with Tarnack’s.

“I think I might prefer Uncle Ollie, as I heard Rusgard’s sons call you, I think it has a nice ring to it.” Perdain said and Olsgurth beamed.

“You could call me Uncle Donkey dung and get away with it Highness.” Olsgurth grinned and Perdain just looked up his eyes shining.

“As with Tarnack, please you ever have permission to call me by my name. I’d prefer it too.”

“You honor me, Perdain.” Olsgurth said as they all returned to their seats and the rest of the evening was spent in friendly conversation. Olsgurth learned Tarnack’s history, where he came from and what lead him to where they were today. Olsgurth learned the entire truth of Perdain and if he hadn’t already fallen in love with the lad, he would have all over again. He learned how Perdain had kept Tarnack informed via letters and how their bond had grown because of them. They told him of the night Perdain escaped the city and how he’d managed to escape the temple.

How Tarnack picked him up and fled in the night to discover they were indeed bonded and the love they held for each other only grew that night. He learned of Father Rembrooke’s role in raising Perdain and his delivering of the letters to the pub to be sent out by Yancy or Pavel. He was laughing at Rusgard’s hand in the Rebellion and told Tarnack and the others his history with Rusgard, who was technically his brother in heart after marrying his younger sister some thirty years earlier.

Olsgurth confessed to a misspent youth most often spent on the wrong side of the law being chased by wielders more often than not and after five years in the army as a foot soldier became a mercenary with Rusgard because the pay was better. There was much laughter over tales when they called the evening to an end. Discussions on the war would resume in the morning and Olsgurth bid everyone a fond goodnight, his spirits quite bright for the first time in many years.

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Act VII - Winter Training Grounds

The following day had the watchtower sending false information to the city. Informing Fenderack Garth had been subdued and that Olsgurth had found nothing in the city other than refugees. The city responded that he was to continue on to Haversmead to reestablish communication and Tarnack laughed.

“I’ll send a letter to the bonded pair stationed there. It takes about seven days to reach Haversmead in weather like this, ten if burdened with foot soldiers. I’ll have them send the same message in ten days to the Capitol to look like you’re on the move. We’ll continue to feed Fenderack misinformation and relax his guard, keep him guessing where we truly are.” Tarnack said and Olsgurth nodded.

“Good strategy. I’ve learned that boy cannot think past the here and now if it does not suit his own desires. He did not think past getting the throne and is floundering.” Olsgurth replied.

“Perdain said as much of his nature. If it’s not instant gratification he considers it not worth his thoughts and that will be his downfall. All I’m worried about now are the people still in the city, they are defenseless against storms or other woes that befall us regularly. I don’t expect Fenderack to protect them should something happen.”

“No, so we pray for a safe winter for them and come spring we liberate them.” Olsgurth winked and Tarnack smiled.

“Aye.” Tarnack said as they moved from the watchtower to inspect the forming troops with their bonded pairs.

They watched Rindi and Thomus riding circuit with the mounted soldiers, Thomus sparring with a practice blade with one of the other mounted men. “S’t truth, that boy is good. I’d say he was wasted as a wielder with a sword arm like that.” Olsgurth chuckled and Tarnack grinned.

“Sometimes we have to rely on skill over talent too. I’ve been under a pack of wolves out of nowhere and close range you need a good sword too to push them back far enough to deal with properly. Especially when you’re bonded. Our wellsprings are a double edged sword at times. They give us great strength but are also walking magnets for trouble. Beasts are drawn to their power and it is why you will never see our wellsprings traveling alone unprotected, its suicide for them.” Tarnack said as Perdain walked across the field with Kassa helping to carry baskets of what looked like supplies. A young pup bouncing along after his heels wagging his tail. Tarnack just grinned, his point made nicely as Mundy

passed and the pup attacked her feet playfully and she squatted to play for a moment.

“You always see that with Wellsprings. Ain’t ever owned a horse myself that didn’t try to nose wellspring’s pockets looking for that hidden sugar.”

“That they don’t have most times and get nosed anyway. Stardust adores Perdain, he can’t walk by without getting his hair nipped at.” Tarnack chuckled as they continued the inspection of the troops.

As the weeks slowly passed, so did Fenderack’s complacency grow. The watchtowers seemed to be getting reestablished slowly and news thus far had been good. Hard travel on the men, bad weather, no signs of wielders or wellsprings mucking about and had Fenderack cared, he’d have found that suspicious. However, he didn’t, so long as the search for Perdain went on and nothing seemed amiss he wasn’t going to worry about it. He had other things to deal with. The nodes in the city were old and full of power and trying to stabilize themselves of their own accord which frustrated Fenderack.

Nodes were a lot harder to keep rouge than people. People he could torture, they had memories of fear. So the only way he could keep land nodes rouge were to keep the people feeding them power scared and off balance or create a natural imbalance in the land itself, like an earthquake or blight on crops, things out of his control. Therefore, he sent his personal hired thugs out nightly to cause trouble. It was no holds barred from tavern fights to raping and murdering. Fenderack sanctioned it all and it kept a heavy cloud of terror over people at night.

Doors were bolted and shutters barred and even then people laid awake waiting for their homes to be invaded. Merchants dared not fight back when these thugs arrived during business hours to take whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, free to pillage at will, no other army was left to keep them in check. They were all out dying of cold following the strict orders of the fool Olsgurth.

Fenderack laughed at his general’s seeming puppet-like folly, much preferring the general out of his chambers and keeping his moral opinions to himself. Olsgurth was to him little more than paid experience. He didn’t pay the man to think, or question his decisions. He paid him to follow orders. Now that he was following them, Fenderack paid little notice.

He was much more concerned keeping the city off-balance, laughing at the lords who came to him daily to grovel and beg they be allowed to retain their homes and lands and offering fealty and service for protection from him.

He had them all begging for bones and scraps, frightened to walk streets alone, laying awake with anxiety that kept the heartbeat of the city keyed to his tempo.

They feared him, when Fenderack walked the city people covered and bowed low. Afraid to meet his eyes, shivering in his very presence.

Fenderack was wearing a warm, fur lined black coat as he headed to the temple, he was bored and thought he'd finally take a look for himself at Perdain's old rooms, to see if he couldn't turn up any clues that would lead his men to Perdain's hideout.

He grabbed the first novice monk from his task as he barged in. The boy almost fainting with fright. "Y-your M-m-majesty." He whimpered, his voice shaking like a leaf.

"Take me to Perdain's rooms." Fenderack said shoving the boy in front of him and the other monks held their breath in fear as the King followed the boy up the stairs to the dormitories.

"B-behind this door S-sire." The youth said and bowing quickly and fleeing as Fenderack pushed open the door and snorted.

It was a small room, comfortably furnished with a soft single bed, a large desk and chair and bookshelves lined the walls.

A small nightstand with two drawers next to the bed, on top a candle holder and a book half read and left forgotten.

Fenderack picked up the book, nothing but sickening sonnets and poems and he tossed that aside as he sat on the edge of the bed and pulled open the drawers.

The top drawer held simple items. A few handkerchiefs for the occasional runny nose, some various trinkets of a few polished stones, a small little box that held a few hard peppermint candies, made mainly for upset stomachs and a small little journal. Fenderack flipped that open and inside was a few charcoal pencil sketches. One of their mother, Father Rembrooke, a few of the other monks in the temple, stuff and nonsense and he was about to toss it aside when he found a poem scribbled on a page next to a half finished sketch. Just the outline of a youthful male face without feature save for a pair of cat's eyes and light toned hair.

In your words I find Hope
In your conviction I find Strength
In your ring I find Security
In your soul I find Love.

Just a simple passage scrawled under the faceless man and Fenderack sneered. He knew who Perdain had been writing about, they had already found evidence of Perdain in correspondence with Tarnack and this sickening love profession over a man Fenderack knew Perdain had never actually met prior to their exchange of letters made him loathe Tarnack even more.

“Perdain is mine and when I find him I’ll make you watch what I do to him. I spent years making him the perfect vessel for me and I’ll not let you take that from me Tarnack.” Fenderack spat as he continued to rummage in the nightstand finding little else of worth. Measly possessions for a Prince Royal. All things often found in a scholar’s hands. Pencils and quills, ink pots and parchment. He moved to the shelves.

Books on every subject, some well worn, others looking to have been just browsed for specific information occasionally. Again, nothing out of place for a student’s room. Even the clothes in the chest were simple. Clean plain jerkins and pants all folded neatly away. Boots resting by the fireplace clean and polished. A single vase on the mantle of the fireplace with a long dead rose still within. Perdain had practically lived like a monk during his tenure in the temple. No paintings or tapestries on the bare walls, no luxuries, no treasures of any kind. The only personal touch in the room was the artist’s easel propped in a corner and covered in a rough canvas tarp. Fenderack removed the cover to see a half finished painting of a man hidden in a cloak riding a midnight black horse through the forest. The War stallion leaping over a fallen tree, his white mane and tail alive with movement and the white star on his forehead mocking Fenderack.

He knew this horse, all of his reports said Tarnack rode a war stallion fitting this exact description. Once again, the man himself was hidden from view, just a rough woolen cloak in black with the wielder’s patch visible and strong hands holding onto the reigns of his horse. Fenderack fumed, how could his spies have missed this clue Perdain was obviously infatuated with the outlaw? Enough so he was scrawling love sonnets and painting portraits of him?

Then Fenderack paused and seized the book again and re-read the poem. Ring? What ring was Perdain referring to? Fenderack racked his brain, he’d met Tarnack during his audience with the King the day before the council ruled on Male Wellsprings. He had been listed as a candidate for King’s Own which he’d received and then spat on. Fenderack thought back.

He remembered Tarnack to be a tall man, not quite blond and not quite brunet with strange golden green eyes. He was average build, showing long hours spent honing muscles suited for riding in the saddle and living off the land as a traveling wielder. The plain silver ring he’d worn that looked old and worthless to a royal but to a common man was a treasure. That was probably the ring given to Perdain. He hardly saw the worth in writing about a cheap bauble.

With nothing else of worth in the room, Fenderack left even in a darker mood. He would make Perdain suffer for this unlike he'd ever tortured him in the past. He'd make Perdain's soul bleed before he was through and he'd start by gutting Tarnack stem to stern and making Perdain watch as Tarnack bled to death in agony.

Garth was always bustling with activity, with the presence of so many wellsprings in the area all at once the very land itself seemed to come alive even in the dead of winter. Every animal was bright and cheerful, including the people. Even in such close company tempers rarely flared. The wielders had placed a dome of power over Garth itself to keep the temperature warmer as they normally did when traveling with troops. With so many men having to sleep in canvas barracks, heat was essential. Wind did not cut through the town, snow fell outside the barrier and melted quickly within the invisible sanctuary. Food was being transported in from the other villages by the wielders residing in other towns and all harvest taxes to the Capitol had been stopped in order to feed the army. All extra crops were sent to Garth and while food had to be rationed to accommodate nearly seventy-five thousand men, women and children, no one went hungry and no one complained.

Especially when it was obvious that everyone was eating the same fare, including all the wielders, wellsprings and even the King and Prince Consort themselves, no one had more than the next man.

The local pub in Garth was always standing room only, the shops and markets thriving with soldiers buying trinkets and keepsakes. Tarnack was walking with Perdain one afternoon through the village on their way to meet with Kassa at the temple to visit those who had come down with mundane illnesses that were common in winter and Tarnack noticed Perdain's eye stray to a shop window. A Little bookshop and stationers store front. Of all those in Garth, Perdain was the only one who had nothing of his own with him. He had come with just a borrowed shirt on his back and not a single copper in his pockets and of them all Perdain complained the least. His eyes for a moment betrayed longing and Tarnack paused. "Beloved, would you like to go inside?" Tarnack asked and Perdain just smiled and shook his head.

"Nay, I couldn't buy anything anyway dearest." Perdain replied moving to continue when Tarnack took his hand.

"Dearest, you don't think for one moment I would not buy you whatever you wanted did you?" Tarnack asked and Perdain just looked taken aback for a moment.

"I wouldn't expect you to Tarnack, that is your purse not mine."

"I am not hearing this. This is not my purse, it is our purse Dain, I cannot believe you think otherwise."

Perdain just looked lost for a moment for a response and he just lowered his head. "But it is yours Tarnack. I would not spend coppers you worked so hard to save. I am used to having nothing of my own dearest. The only thing I have ever had in my life that I can truly call mine is the ring you gave to me beloved."

"What? You had nothing at all?' Tarnack looked aghast and Perdain nodded sadly.

"No. Father never allowed mother to spend money on me. All I had in the temple was property of the temple. My bed, my clothes, the books I read, even the food I ate. I have learned how to be grateful for many things. Had it not been for the monks kindness to me I would have had far less. There is no need to waste money on me Tarnack. I will live without." Perdain said honestly and Tarnack's stomach hurt.

"Aye, you will live true, but by the gods dearest you did not expect me never to give you anything did you?"

The look on Perdain's face proved he had. "But you gave me your ring. Why on earth would I expect you to give me more?" Perdain asked sincerely and Tarnack was now more than sick, he was determined.

"Because I'm your bloody husband and I love you for starters Dain. Your birthday is tomorrow, did you think I would let that go without giving you something to celebrate?"

"It is just my birthday. Why would I get a gift just for being born?" Perdain asked and Tarnack's eyes widened.

"You've never had a birthday present?"

"No. Mother used to bring me a little small cake to eat with her on my birthday though when I was little and still in the palace. I haven't had cake since I was seven. During my birthday in the temple she had to stay in the Palace with my father and Fenderack. We do share a birthday and Father always wanted mother to spend that day with He and Fenderack. Rembrooke used to mull me cider to toast my day though which was nice."

"Which is a bloody crime Perdain! What about Mid-winter Festival?"

“Always spent in prayer alone, is it not a ten days to give thanks for your blessings after all?”

“Yes, but also a seasonal fest of joy to give to those you love.”

“Oh I know that. I used to borrow Rembrooke’s paints and make something for my mother and father Rembrooke, of course I did. Rembrooke would give me paper so I could make gifts. His present to me was the paper.”

“That you turned into gifts for others. I always heard Mid-Winter Festival at the palace was a feast for days with music and dancing and gifting. What did you do when you were little? I’m almost afraid to hear the answer.”

“It’s true, the main hall was always decorated beautifully and I used to love to sit on the stairs and watch the servants put up the decorations. However, because I always managed to get in someone’s way coming down the stairs I was usually punished and made to stay in my room. I never went to the feasts or danced.”

“I’m pretty sure no gifts too?”

“Oh no. Father said it was frivolous waste for a child.”

“Why does this not surprise me? Did you have a single toy Perdain?”

“I remember playing with a ball and cup on a string once, one of the servant’s children let me play with it after I watched her with it, but Fenderack broke it right after. I was never any good at it anyway. I couldn’t get the ball in the cup like she could. I asked Mother to get her a new one and I think she did.” Perdain said and Tarnack seized Perdain’s hand and literally dragged him inside the bookstore.

“I have heard enough to make me sick for the rest of my days. It is not frivolous waste and I think it’s deplorable a bloody Prince has to watch the servant children play with toys while he has none because his father was a bastard and purposefully depriving you. No wonder Fenderack is such a prick! He seems to have learned it from a master. I’m sorry beloved, but I will never forgive them what they put you through, I was a wielder sheep herder’s son and I had so much more, it’s part of being a child, hell it’s part of being human! As your husband I am putting my husbandly foot down and buying you something right here and now, just on principle at this point.” Tarnack said and Perdain held up his hands.

“Tarnack, really I do not need gifts. You have given me so much already.”

“I haven’t even started Perdain. You are never, ever going without simple gifts of celebration or affection ever again. Please dearest gifts are more than objects, they are tokens and memories and smiles. Choose anything at all you’d love to

have just for the sake of having Dearest.” Tarnack said as the old shop owner came in from the back of his shop and started seeing his royal guests.

“Joy of Joys to have you both here. May I help you Sire? Your Highness?” the man asked and Tarnack smiled.

“Yes, you can convince my love he can have whatever his heart desires. His birthday is tomorrow and I want him to have whatever he wants as a gift from me.” Tarnack said and the old man smiled.

“Father Rembrooke has already been by and as your teacher, Your Highness, he spent a long time extolling your scholarly virtues as well as telling me you are also quite the artist.”

“I like to paint and draw, aye. I’m not particularly good.” Perdain said a little embarrassed suddenly and Tarnack snorted.

“He lies good sir. Before we bonded I saw a painting he did of the city when he was still a boy. He has remarkable talent and is sometimes too modest when it is not required.” Tarnack said and Perdain turned curious.

“When did you see one of my paintings? You never told me this.”

“I just now remembered. It was hanging in the Pub I was staying at in the city. Haddy told me you’d painted it and it shocked me that a boy could paint as you did.”

“I know the one, the one I did from the bell tower yes?” Perdain asked and Tarnack nodded.

“I gave it to Father Rembrooke and he told me it was hanging there in Haddy’s pub. The only other one I did that did not get painted over because canvas is hard to come by I gave to my mother. It was of the temple gardens where she and I used to sit together. I think Fenderack burned it long ago.” Perdain said and Tarnack had to rub the spot of frowning flesh between his eyes, he was getting a headache now. Canvas was cheap and he couldn’t believe Perdain had had to use the same canvas repeatedly just to paint.

“I will refrain from cursing the air blue at the moment. Dearest please for my sanity and soul let me spoil you for the sake of spoiling you. Please choose something, anything.” Tarnack said and Perdain frowned concerned.

“It really troubles you this much Tarnack?”

“Aye dearest, it does. Very much so.” Tarnack said and Perdain took Tarnack’s hand and kissed it.

"I will choose something if it means that much to you beloved." Perdain said moving to browse the store and Tarnack leaned over the counter and whispered.

"Please, after we leave get together some canvas and paints for me. I know Perdain, he's going to be insanely frugal and his idea of spoiling and mine are vastly different. I'll pick them up later and can you wrap them for me too please for his birthday?"

"Aye, sire." The old man winked as Perdain slowly walked bookshelves and examined a few books before setting them back again. Perdain finally came to a stack of small little blank journals bound in bright cloth hard covers. He looked at them all and finally smiled and chose a bright blue with a raised brocade in the fabric. Simple and elegant, very much like Perdain was himself and he carried the small book with him as he went to a row of cups that held several charcoal pencils and he chose a single pencil and brought both over to Tarnack.

"These are very nice. Might I have these please?" Perdain asked and Tarnack wanted to bang his head against the counter. Both together would cost a single copper.

"You may, are you sure there is nothing else you'd like too dearest?" Tarnack asked and Perdain shook his head.

"Oh there are many nice things here but this is more than enough. I'm sure such a nice journal is expensive. I was afraid to choose it." Tarnack sighed. Perdain had the education of masters and the mind of a genius and the material sense of a newborn babe. A Prince Royal worried about the cost of a blank little hand journal made the gears in Tarnack's head want to stop all function in disbelief.

"Fear not beloved, it is not expensive. It's so inexpensive I'd really wish you'd choose something else to go with it in addition to just the bit pencil. A journal is more of a necessity for someone with a mind like yours than a gift. Please choose something not for it's working value, but something you like to have just for the sake of having. Something you would find frivolous Beloved. That's the whole point of a present, something you want but don't need." Tarnack urged and took the journal and set it on the counter and would not budge until Perdain went browsing again. The old man's eyes were wide with shock.

"I know my friend. It's criminal isn't it? Prince Royal he is and not a materialistic bone in his body." Tarnack sighed pulling up the stool by the counter to wait as the old man sat on his behind the counter.

"I never believed the rumors we heard over the years. Our resident wielder retired from the city years ago, before the young highness left the palace. He used to go on and on about how one twin was spoiled over the other. How one

had toys and the other could only watch. How one got showered with affection and the other ignored. How he had to read only in the library, because if he took a book out, his brother would destroy it. How many times he was punished for no reason at all. I used to think the old man senile. What father could be that beastly? I now believe and it's breaking my heart."

"Yours and mine both friend. I only learned this today myself. Gods, how many times as a child my father would come home with candy or toys for all of us for no reason at all other than he felt like giving us gifts. How many birthdays I spent wanting to throw up stuffed with my favorite dinner and cake and lost in a sea of wrappings. How many mid-winters my mother would bake for days and make us all high as kites on sugary wonders. Every morning during mid-winter festival waking up to a different present waiting for us in our places at the breakfast table. All ten days in a row and I had six siblings mind you, my father saved all year long to spoil us all rotten during mid-winter. It boggles my mind how someone can go their whole lives without a single solitary note even saying simply 'I love you' waiting for them on the last day of mid-winter festival. I find it disgustingly shameful." Tarnack sighed as Perdain, oblivious to the quiet conversation tried finding something he didn't automatically consider the uses of first.

The book on maps and trade would be useful out here, the book on medicinal herbs would also be good to learn just in case of emergencies, the book on Historical Wielders and Wellsprings was something he could use to plan tactical strategies with if he hadn't already read that book a dozen times already and knew cover to cover. He sighed, his mind just refused to stop considering worth and value in the practical sense, he never once in his life did anything impractical.

Finally however he did find something. A little book almost lost on the shelves. A plain leather bound book of sonnets and poems. Like the one he used to keep on his nightstand back in the temple.

Impractical poems and verses, light musings on nothing more than simply love, both joyful and sorrowful. Things he liked to read just for the joy in reading them. He smiled as he carried the book to Tarnack. "Is this alright?" Perdain asked, again unsure of how much of Tarnack's money he was spending and nervous he was being too frivolous. He handed the book to Tarnack who smiled as he looked at the cover.

"Aye love, that's precisely what I meant. I didn't know you liked poems." Tarnack said and Perdain nodded.

"I do. Father always said they were worthless reading, but sometimes I liked to just sit and read something that didn't make me think but feel."

“That’s what they are for dearest.” Tarnack said setting the poetry book with the journal and pencil.

“How much my good man?” Tarnack said and the old man smiled.

“The journal and pencil come to one copper together and the other book is two, three in total sire.” The old man said and Tarnack tossed out four. “Go choose another Journal and pencil Perdain, I want you to have one that you will promise to use only for frivolous things and one that I know you will use for non-frivolous things. One should also always have a spare pencil too dearest.” Tarnack winked and Perdain just nodded and smiled and went back over to the table and chose a green journal in the same brocade and another pencil.

The book shop keeper wrapped all the books and pencils in paper tied with string and handed the bundle to Perdain. “Happy Birthday to you Your Highness.”

“It is the best birthday I have had yet and still not quite here yet. Thank you very much.” Perdain said taking his bundle and holding it close to his chest. Tarnack just laid a hand to Perdain’s shoulder and steered them toward the door.

“Good Day to you my friend.” Tarnack said turning to wink meaningfully at the shop keeper who nodded and smiled and as the bell on the door chimed as they left the shopkeeper went to put together Tarnack’s order for Perdain.

Only the very best of everything he had and he’d refuse to take more than five coppers for the entire lot even if it was worth more than thrice that. It was about time the Prince was given gifts and not just from his husband. The shop keeper’s wife came in from the back room wiping her eyes.

“I saw all of that I did. My word it breaks my heart it does. Don’t forget the brushes too love, he’ll need items to paint with he will.” She said picking out one of each of the different brushes to add to the rapidly filling box.

“Aye Love. Why don’t you go to the other shops, spread the word. Tell them what we just saw and heard. Food is too short to have a feast for him too, but by the Gods that lad does more for us in one day than any one has ever done for him his whole life combined. It’s about time the people give a little back to such a blessed boy.” The shopkeeper said and his wife was already pulling on her coat.

“Aye!” She said heading out to run the gossip down the line of shops and from the clothier to the jeweler to the cobbler and to cabinet maker. Soon everyone knew and tongues were wagging from citizens to soldiers in shock.

Olsгурth was with the blacksmith working on sharpening swords when the gossip reached their ears and Olsгурth was immediately out shopping himself for a gift to give Perdain for his sixteen birthday.

There were some foods not rationed. There was always plenty of sugar and flour in Garth so the bakery and confectioners was the only shop still turning food trade with sweets. Olsgurth remembered searching Perdain's rooms and finding a little box filled with peppermint candies. Granted they had been the kind that were meant for aiding sour stomachs before bed, but still sweet candy in a way. Therefore, obviously the Prince liked Peppermint, so Olsgurth bought a small bag of peppermint salt water taffies, each wrapped in bright red wax paper. Then he headed over to the cabinet maker and chose a small hand carved wooden box that had a moon and stars on the lid. Close enough to the wellspring symbols to have meaning. It was a hand sized trinket box of cherry wood, polished smooth and varnished to protect the wood. The brass hinges of the lid sturdy and Olsgurth purchased the box and filled it with the salt water taffies and had it wrapped to give the Prince for his birthday the next day.

Tarnack could feel Perdain was on an emotional high as he clutched his gifts to his chest as they walked back from the temple. They had spent an hour visiting the sick and offering aide and then evenings were always left free. There was a time to work and there was a time to rest. All work without a means to unwind before bed after dinner was unwise and unhealthy. Not even Perdain, the one who worked from the moment he rose in the morning, argued the logic of rest, even if most times Tarnack had to remind his husband to stop writing notes and to put his work away until morning.

Once back in their room in the temple, Perdain carefully unwrapped his treasures and the book of sonnets and poems went on the table on his side of the bed and the green journal was added to his pile of loose notes on the table and the blue journal and pencils were placed in the drawer of his nightstand table. He practically floated around the room and Tarnack was simultaneously happy and melancholy. He was happy that Perdain was in joyful spirits and melancholy that it was over such trivial matters.

Everyday Tarnack learned of yet another abuse Perdain had suffered on top of the rest. Physical abuse from Fenderack and Mental abuse from his father. As a boy Tarnack always believed Royals had the good life. They lived in palaces and ate fancy food. They wore the best clothes, wore priceless jewels and had everything they desired at their privileged fingertips. All the stories said they did after all. Yet here was the first born son of a King, who had never had a single possession to call his alone in his entire life. His early childhood spent watching his brother have the world served to him on silver platters while he went to bed without supper for sitting on a flight of stairs and making someone take a simple two steps around him as he viewed a world he was not allowed to partake in.

How he must have ached inside, because Tarnack remembered vividly his own childhood. How simple the world was and how easily a young child could get jealous over something another child had. A ball, a jump rope or a piece of

candy, life was black and white when little and when it went black it was very black and the world was ending if you didn't get a piece of that cake too. How devastating to watch your brother play with his toys and eat his cake in front of you while you had to sit and pretend your heart wasn't shattered in pieces.

To have your father tell you it was frivolous nonsense in one breath while in his hands was one of those frivolous items you wanted so desperately and that he'd hand to your brother with a pat on the head. To know your mother wanted to give you those things and was forbidden to do so and only to grow older and be sent away to a temple and into utter poverty.

Bad enough to be away from the one person he knew loved him while losing the simple luxury of his own bed. Sent away from home to sleep in a borrowed one, to wear what the monks could find him from charity boxes. To read books he could never own. To feel the pinch of poverty so greatly that he had to reuse a canvas repeatedly if he wanted to paint with borrowed paints and to use his precious gifts of new parchment paper to make gifts to give to others. All the while probably hearing about Fenderack's new horse, his birthday feast, his mid-winter festival exploits.

How Perdain could be as un-jaded and sweet-natured as he was Tarnack would never understand. Had he been in Perdain's shoes as a child he was fairly positive he'd have turned out to be justifiably bitter and sour. Anyone in the same position had every right to be foul and hateful on principle. Nevertheless, Perdain wasn't. He was grateful for every meal, cherished mundane items like precious gems, and thanked the Gods for his blessings which seemed rather few and far between in Tarnack's point of view.

Tarnack now realized why Perdain was always looking at his ring with a smile on his face when he was lost in thought. Why it never came off his finger and how very much it truly meant to him. This was his first and only possession, given to him by someone he had never met along with a letter that had probably looked like Tarnack had gone off his rocker to Perdain.

Once Perdain finished setting his books down he walked over to where Tarnack was sitting in a chair by the fire and gracefully lowered himself on Tarnack's lap and two arms folded tightly around Tarnack's neck in a fierce hug. "Thank you so much for my presents beloved. I will love them always I will." He sighed into Tarnack's neck, his voice close to tears.

Tarnack just wrapped his arms around Perdain, loving when Perdain sat in his lap like this and he just held his love close. "You can thank me dearest by perhaps drawing me a picture in your new journal? I would love to see you draw something. I loved your painting and I admit I am very curious what you can do with just a pencil." Tarnack said and Perdain smiled and nodded.

“What would you like me to draw for you dearest?” Perdain asked and Tarnack just shrugged.

“Just something from your heart beloved. I don’t care what you draw, draw me anything at all.” Tarnack replied and lost his lovely lap warmer as Perdain got up to retrieve his blue journal and pencil and stretched out on his stomach on the bed his new pencil already scratching away with a concentrated look on his youthful face.

Tarnack resisted the urge to get up and watch, he’d wait until Perdain was finished so he stretched out in the comfortable chair by the fire and just dozed a little before dinner.

Tarnack awoke to a gentle hand in his hair and Perdain was handing him the journal. “You said to draw my heart.” Perdain said and Tarnack opened the cover to the first page and his heart stopped and then filled to bursting with overwhelming love and affection.

There on the first page was a portrait of himself. Tarnack’s smiling face, head and shoulders. His hair being blown by invisible winds and his eyes looking off into the distance at something only the charcoal version of Tarnack could see.

Underneath the portrait was written in beautiful script lettering:

In your Words I find Hope
In your Conviction I find Strength
In your Ring I find Security
In your Soul I find Love
In your Love I find my Truest Blessings

Tarnack let go of the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. “Beloved, this is beautiful.” He said turning up his eyes to Perdain and setting the book down as he stood to pull Perdain in his arms and kissed him breathless.

Perdain just rested his cheek against Tarnack’s chest as their lips parted and sighed lovingly. “That is the second time I tried drawing that picture. The first time I had no vision of you, always just a phantom without form you were to me. A man I loved and who’s face I could not see. The poem finished all but the last line, because knew I loved you I did; knowing now the love is returned completes not only the poem but me. You are my heart Tarnack. I don’t need presents or gifts or anything material in this world. I have you and you are worth so much more to me.” Perdain said and Tarnack choked back an involuntary sob and swept Perdain into his arms and carried him to bed where Tarnack showered him with love and affection.

Tarnack was moved beyond what mere words could express, so he expressed his devotion in ways he knew could speak much more clearly than words ever could and Perdain understood and their bond sang with unfettered joy in each other, with love that knew no bounds and with passion that knew no ends.

Perdain was sleeping, his small body lost in the covers when Tarnack got up and dressed in his robe found one of the novice monks working as servants, pages and runners in the hidden temple in the hall. He asked that dinner be brought to them in their rooms that night instead of the hall and when it arrived Tarnack gently woke Perdain and they ate together in private and then returned to bed to nestle together. Perdain reading aloud from his new book of poems to Tarnack. Tarnack's eyes closed and listening to the melody of a soft tenor reading words of love and devotion before the book was set aside in favor of spending the rest evening lost in the comfort in each other's embrace.

The following morning, Tarnack slipped out early before Perdain was awake and hurried to the bookshop where the Keeper and his wife lived above the shop itself like all the shops in Garth. The Keeper and his wife were already up and waiting for the King to arrive and there was two beautifully wrapped packages. One large and square which was obviously a few blank canvases to paint on and the other a box which was heavy with supplies. Tarnack refused to pay less than ten coppers. Unlike his bonded, he did know the value of items and he knew the contents of the boxes were at least twenty coppers if not more. He was grateful for the discount but he wasn't going to accept highway robbery as a discount either.

He paid and dashed back to the temple, arms laden and he set Perdain's gifts in his place at the main stone table where people were already gathering for breakfast and Tarnack was amazed to see his gifts were not the only ones beginning to pile up in Perdain's place. Perdain was going to be more than surprised when he arrived at breakfast that morning.

Tarnack returned to find Perdain up and washing and he smiled from the tub as Tarnack returned. Tarnack leaned over the tub and kissed Perdain good morning. "Happy Birthday Dearest." He smiled as he stood back up again and Perdain's eyes twinkled.

"Thank you beloved. Where were you this morning? You're usually not up before I am." Perdain asked and Tarnack grinned.

"Just taking care of a few things before breakfast." Tarnack winked as Perdain got out of the tub and dried off. Combing and braiding his wet hair before dressing in the warm thick garments Kassa had brought him and together they

arrived at the breakfast table where Perdain stopped short as the whole room cheered his birthday greetings and he saw a pile of gifts in his place.

Rembrooke stepped forward and took the stunned youth in his arms and hugged him deeply, he was rarely in the hidden temple anymore sharing a bed at night with Kassa in the main temple and usually taking his breakfast there. However, both he and Kassa were there this morning to wish Perdain a happy birthday. "Happy Day my son." He said as he took the cup of warmed mulled cider from Kassa's hands and handing it to Perdain's shaking fingers.

"It's tradition you and I greet this morning with a toast. Happy Birthday to the son of my heart, may you always find true blessings." Rembrooke said taking the second cup Kassa held and Perdain's eyes were misty with affection as he drank Rembrooke's lovely cider. The man always had a knack of making it perfect with spices that comforted and warmed all the way to ones toes.

Perdain drank deeply and then smiled. "Thank you so very much my father." He was choked up with joy and Tarnack smiled as he took Perdain's hand and led him to his place at the table where Perdain's eyes boggled at the massive pile of gifts stacked not only on the table but all around his chair.

"Happy birthday beloved." Tarnack said as Perdain fell into his chair, his legs no longer able to support him in shock.

"What is all this?" He asked, genuinely lost in surprise.

"A real birthday for a change Perdain. Go on dearest, open your presents." Tarnack said sitting in his chair to watch just like the others. Olsгурth to Tarnack's Left. Beside Perdain, Rembrooke and Kassa with Ednack and Tarna beside Olsгурth, Yancy, Pavel, Mundy, Caery, Tarnack's older brother Ednar and his wellspring Randa rounding out the main inner council. Everyone else was now living in the barracks with their assigned troops. Except for the children who were kept warm and safe in the temple under the supervision of the monks while their parent's worked and who were all at the end of the stone table excitedly watching Perdain and wanting to see him open his presents. Along with the half dozen child tenders and teacher monks who were feeding the children so they didn't get antsy waiting for food.

Only the inner core remained in the hidden temple and it was almost like a family gathering this morning. The King and Prince Consort surrounded by their General, The representative of the Brotherhood of the Faith, and Tarnack's King's Own Wielders and Wellsprings. Field appointed to a new King and by a new King. A Room of trust and affection as well as a highly trained and skilled council members.

“Oh my goodness, where do I start? I never...” Perdain stumbled and he never stumbled vocally, his voice betraying his heavy emotion and Tarnack reached over and slid his box closer.

“Start here dearest. From me to you my love.” Tarnack said and Perdain looked up shocked.

“But you bought me books yesterday.”

“That was yesterday and today is your birthday.” Tarnack winked and Perdain was shocked but carefully began unwrapping the large box.

What was inside made Perdain for the second time since Tarnack had known him, made him cry. This time however in emotional joy. Paints and brushes, pastel chalks and wax sticks, everything an artist needed lay within.

“Oh Tarnack, I don’t know what to say... Beloved thank you so very much.”

“There’s more dearest.” Tarnack smiled patting the larger package. “One needs something to paint on too my love.” Tarnack said indicating the obvious, it was hard to disguise framed canvas after all. Perdain just wiped his eyes and continued getting lost in wrapping paper.

From Ednack and Tarna he received a warm lamb’s wool scarf and hat and matching fleece lined gloves that Tarna had made herself knitting in the evenings. All in a soft slate blue that brought out Perdain’s lovely eyes. Also in their package was the part of the ensemble that Ednack had chosen, a fleece lined new coat to go with his scarf and gloves. It was getting into the dead of winter after all and Perdain was always wearing many layers because he didn’t have his own coat. Now he did and it was beautiful. Perdain cried again and Tarnack chuckled and handed him a napkin.

“You might want to save the tears beloved. You have a lot of gifts left to open dearest.” Tarnack smiled and Perdain chuckled as he wiped his eyes smiling brightly.

“Aye.” He said moving to the next box. Kassa had made him some lilac scented cream lotion for his hands and peppermint smelling lip balm in a little pot with a screw lid that Perdain could carry in his pocket. The cold always sapped the skin dry and Perdain was always coming into the temple to relieve his chapped hands and lips.

“When you run out dear, just come see me and I’ll fill them again. This present is eternal.” Kassa smiled and Perdain was already using the lip balm and smiling.

“This is so wonderful, thank you Kassa. I always have such horrible lips in winter.” Perdain sighed as the balm soothed his chapped lips and he moved to the next brightly wrapped bundle.

The next was just a letter, tied with a bright red ribbon. Perdain unfolded it and read the deed of ownership over a horse.

Pavel and Mundy smiled. “We inspected her ourselves from head to toe. She’s such a beautiful animal, sweet tempered and mild and very fast and smooth running. We both rode her and she’d not throw a babe in the saddle she’s that sure footed. You need your own horse Perdain and I think she’ll be more than your mount but a dear companion for years yet. We’ve had her moved to the temple stables so you can meet her after breakfast. Her name is Sundance and such a beautiful lady she is.” Mundy said and Perdain was speechless. Pavel and Mundy both raised horses and if they thought this horse a remarkable animal she was probably so much more. He was lost for words and Pavel only smiled from across the table.

“Perdain, we all love you. It is our joy to give her to you.” Pavel said and Perdain’s face was filled with emotional euphoria.

“I shall never find words more adequate than thank you and they seem so trite to what I feel.” Perdain said and Mundy grinned.

“We can tell Perdain. We can tell.” Mundy said as his deed was set aside and the next small box was placed in his hands.

It was the cherry wood box of peppermints and Perdain cheered as he opened the box. “Oh I love Peppermint Taffy! It’s my favorite and I was drooling watching them make this the other day on the taffy puller in the shop window. Who told you I liked this? I don’t even think I’ve ever told Tarnack.” Perdain asked running his hands over the beautiful little box that held treasured sweets.

“Back in the city Sire, I had to search your rooms and I remembered seeing a little box of Peppermint stomach mints and thought you might like Peppermint. I’m eternally glad I pay attention to details, it seems my hunch was correct.” Olsgurth smiled and Perdain smiled right back.

“More than correct. Please let’s spoil breakfast and share one with me.” Perdain said holding open the box and everyone, including the children got a piece of Perdain’s candy. He was so happy he had to share his bounty. The rest of the candy and the box were added to his growing pile of presents. Perdain knew that little box would forever live on his bedside table for the rest of his days and always kept full of peppermint and he’d think of Olsgurth every time he opened his treasure box.

Yancy and Caery had bought him a new brush and comb set and bottles of scented hair soaps to go with them. The children had all drawn him pictures in class the day before and the monks had put them all into a little bound notebook.

Rembrooke had broken slightly with tradition now that he was able to, he'd always wanted to give Perdain gifts on his birthday and had been forbidden to do so by the King. From Rembrooke was a note that Perdain was to go to the book shop and pick out five books he wanted on any subject matter and at any cost and the Bookkeeper would bill Rembrooke the cost of the books later. Perdain looked in heaven, the perfect gift for Perdain would always be a book, the lad devoured them and cherished them and to a scholar worth more than a dozen precious gems and baubles.

There were more items to follow that had been delivered to the temple all morning. A message from the clothier to come to the shop to be fitted for new clothes. The cabinet maker had sent over a gorgeous carved trunk to hold Perdain's items. The cobbler sent a letter saying Perdain was to come in to be fitted for a new pair of boots. The jeweler sent over a silver moon pendant and a small diamond star pendant on a delicate silver chain. A reflection of his gifts in elegant simple beauty which Tarnack affixed around his neck.

There were letters, candies, trinkets, bottles of wine, and the pile kept growing as presents kept getting delivered. Even when Perdain thought he'd finally managed to get through all his presents so everyone could eat breakfast they were still coming in all throughout the meal. Finally, the last gift arrived from the bakery and the baker himself delivered it. A large cake in white and blue frosting with "Happy 16th Birthday Prince Perdain" written in blue icing on the top. The icing was laced with a hint of peppermint around the chocolate cake itself.

It was a large cake and everyone got a large piece as Perdain cut and served his bounty. Large slabs of it he gave to cheering children still at the table and his jaw ached from smiling. This was the single most memorable birthday he'd ever had or would ever have he was sure. He felt alive with joy.

After breakfast, Perdain dashed to the stables with Tarnack, dying to see Sundance. She was in the stall next to Stardust and Stardust and Sundance were nose to nose greeting each other and seeming to get along well together.

Whereas Stardust was a large war stallion built for battle and long hard slow traveling with only bursts of hard running, he was built for rough stamina and fighting, not speed. Sundance was a runner, bred to be able to run very long distances easily. Messengers always used animals like Sundance. She was not a pack animal or fighter, she was pure speed. Her long legs were toned with hard muscles, her body streamlined and elegant. Like Stardust she had a white mane and tail, but her body was dun and dusted with golden tones. Even her hooves had been painted with gold paint and her eyes were blue as the sky. Perdain

gaped as he walked in, she was perhaps the most beautiful horse he'd ever laid eyes on and she flicked her head and tail as he entered and walked over to her.

"Hello Sundance. Such a beautiful girl you are." He breathed in awe of the graceful animal and she butted and nosed his chest and her breath whiffed his ears and hair as Tarnack opened her pen and they went in to see her.

"She's stunning she is." Tarnack breathed inspecting the animal and running his hands over her flanks appreciatively. This was the perfect mount for Perdain. She could carry a delicate wellspring with ease and sprint away even from the most dangerous and swift of were-beasts. All Wellsprings rode runners for that purpose. They could be taken out of harms way quickly. Just as all wielders who rode mounted always rode war stallions, even Belle had been a good war horse trained mare. They could fight along side wielders and use powerful hooves to help fight and strong teeth to bite. Both Runners and War Beasts bred to be sure footed and reliable. There was no skittishness as Tarnack inspected her flanks and withers. Even if she did bat him almost playfully with her long tail. He chuckled and patted her rump. She was magnificent.

Perdain was lost in laying his forehead against hers as she lowered her eyes down and he scratched her ears lovingly and whispered affectionately at her. Her lips coming up to nibble his hair and Perdain laughed as she tickled his ears with her breath. This was a good bond, the mare seemed just as affectionate over her new owner as Perdain was in his beautiful girl. Tarnack stepped back and over to Stardust and pulled from his pocket a bit of sugar that Stardust inhaled from his palm. "So Stardust? What do you think of our lady friend?" Tarnack asked and Stardust just snorted and began nosing Tarnack's pocket for more sugar. Which Tarnack always had and supplied.

Perdain was also feeding Sundance sugar from his pockets and laughing as she tickled his palms with her lips.

Tarnack taught Perdain how to saddle her and they took a quick morning ride. This is where Tarnack saw the most beauty in the animal. Her smooth gait, even in a dead run, barely jarred Perdain in her saddle. His long braid whipping out behind him as they rode the fields together. Stardust and Sundance matching stride for stride.

Once back in the stables, Tarnack showed Perdain how to groom and brush her to make sure to protect her flanks from dust and burs that would be painful to her under a saddle. Care for the horse was a task that was personal and essential. Tarnack stressed that no matter how tired you were, your horse was even more so, and their care came before your own. Perdain seemed to enjoy brushing her and there were a few little braids in her mane and tail before he finished with his lady and he and Tarnack left the stables.

Perdain practically dancing as he walked and it was obvious to a fool, it was love at first sight between Sundance and Perdain.

Fenderack was not in a good mood as he stalked the corridors. His birthday had come and gone with just a handful of gifts delivered from the lords, tokens to show they had not forgotten. He had eaten alone, spent the day alone, the evening alone and went to bed alone. He wasn't even in the mood for one of his women or girls that night. Even his simpering mother who had always favored Perdain had always wished him a happy birthday. His father would have showered him with presents and thrown him a feast. Even if they had stood in his way, they had at least always given him what he wanted. He had always felt good to know he was being favored over Perdain and what he was missing most was gloating over his brother like he always did. He'd always reach out telepathically on their birthday and inform Perdain of all he had gotten, all the cake he'd eaten and the feast father had thrown for him and not for Perdain.

Perdain was always relegated to poverty and Fenderack had thrived on the pang of sadness he always felt from Perdain especially on their birthday. That was what made today the worst birthday, he had no Perdain to lord over, no Perdain to tease and torment. That's always what he had looked forward to the most on this day, rubbing Perdain's weak little nose in the fact that Fenderack had everything and Perdain was huddled in a cold stone room by a fire with nothing.

As children he would purposefully open all his presents in Perdain's presence. Always eat his cake where Perdain could see, always offer to share and then laugh as Perdain fell for the ruse and would approach carefully, his little hands always held out to the toy only to have the toy snatched away and his brother laughing at him and teasing him for being a fool.

Fenderack was stretched out in his bed, his eyes shut and he tried something he hadn't tried in months, reaching out to Perdain's mind. They were twins and their mental link was stronger than most bonded pairs.

Perdain was sitting at dinner with Tarnack and Olsgurth when he jolted in his seat, eyes wide with horror and his hand gripping Tarnack's in an icy grip of fear.

::So you live brother, I feel your fear. Did you miss me?: Fenderack purred feeling Perdain's fear in his senses like a sweet drug.

"Fenderack! Leave me alone!" Perdain's voice shook and now Tarnack was livid and leaping into Perdain's mind, needing to 'hear' what was being said first.

::Leave you alone? But I have brother, a long time. Did you really think distance could sever our bond? We are twins brother and you are foolish to think I cannot

reach your mind at the very least. Where power flows I will always reach you. Think not I will not find you brother. You are mine.::

::You are wrong Fenderack. He is mine and I will block his mind from your touch you filthy pig. I will never allow you to hurt him ever again.:: Tarnack responded and Fenderack jolted in bed, not expecting the third voice to speak. He hadn't detected the presence at all. Who was this stranger tapping into their conversation so easily?

::Who are you to deny me? Perdain is mine, tied to me from birth and you can do precious little to stop me fool.::

::Oh? That is where you are so very wrong and so very arrogant. Nothing more than a spoiled petulant child. I can feel you Fenderack, even from here I can see how weakened you are. A pitiful excuse for a wielder, and even more pitiful excuse for a boy playing king with his papa's stolen crown. You may have had more power than Perdain but you do not have more than I do. I will not fall prey to your threats, you do not scare me boy!:: Tarnack sent mocking Fenderack as Perdain had always been mocked. It was about time Fenderack got a taste of his own medicine, let him fear for a change.

::I am King and you will address me so stranger. Who are you?: Fenderack demanded and Tarnack squeezed Perdain's shocked hand as he sat privy to the conversation taking place in his head.

::I am your worst nightmare boy. I am the one you could not catch. I am the thorn in your side. I am the one who will never stop until you are dead. I am the one who even now has all of your army under my banner. I am the one who calls Perdain beloved as my bonded husband and I am the one the people have chosen over you. I am King Tarnack and I am coming for you boy. Older, stronger, wiser and infinitely more prepared for battle. Cherish your time on this earth Fenderack, it will be short.:: Tarnack sent and he could taste the fear in the link, feel it.

::You lie! My army is in Waysmeet!:: Fenderack sent and Tarnack laughed in the bond.

::If you think so you're an even bigger fool than I thought. Did you really think that an army would willingly make a suicide march for a spoiled brat? Did you really underestimate the wisdom of Olsгурth that much? Did you never pay attention to basic tactics during remedial wielder's training? Have you not noticed you are very much alone in the city? No army marches completely in full battle gear just to reestablish watchtowers you fool. I had expected by now at least even you would have realized you have been deserted boy.::

::You lie.::

::You wish boy. I have all the wielders and wellsprings in my ranks, I have your brother as my bonded, I have your esteemed General swearing fealty to me, I have your army also sworn to my banner, I have your crops feeding them, I have the people behind me and thus I already have your crown. All that is left is your city, your last bastion of defense and cut off from the rest of Holst for months already. You live still only because I will not send men on a winter campaign and risk their lives over a small little piss ant like you. We train in comfort just waiting until spring foolish boy. If you think I am lying by all means come see for yourself. We're all happily sitting here in Garth, not two hundred leagues from you. Send your men if you dare, weaken your already weakened city further. Taste fear child playing king, murderer, rapist, butcher and filthy were-beast. Your days are numbered, your death warrant I hold in my hands.:: Tarnack said and Fenderack's eyes widened, true fear gripped him and both Perdain and Tarnack felt the effects.

::Tarnack is right Fenderack, it ends here brother. We will not allow you to cause more harm. We all stand with Tarnack and you are very much now alone. You have reached too far, taken too much and now you will pay the price for your actions.:: Perdain sent with a confidence born from Tarnack. Finally for the first time he was standing up to Fenderack. No more would he be a victim!

::Lies! All Lies!:: Fenderack sent cutting the connection abruptly and sitting up in bed and screaming for one of his men.

"What is it Sire?" The large man with an eye patch over his right eye and a severely scared faced asked. He wreaked of body odor and stale ale.

"What was the report from Waysmeet Watchtower again?"

"Same as all the other's sire. Why?" He asked and Fenderack threw himself out of bed.

"Take a small troop of men to Garth. Go as refugees! Report to me what you find there."

"Sire, it's five feet of snow out there. The road to Garth will be a death sentence on your men! The forest track will be littered with hungry were-beasts on top of freezing conditions. You'd need a full army to push in weather like this and even then half the men wouldn't survive the journey. This is madness, even Olsгурth told you this before. It's very true sire. He may be a righteous old goat, but he's the very best. The only reason he's making any progress is he's taking short treks with a large army behind him and even then it is days between reports. This is a fools errand. You cannot afford to lose any more men. You have just one hundred guards and all those mercenaries grumbling about pay and your lack of timely payments. They are cold and hungry, the crops are not coming in because

there are no wielder escorts to guard the merchants from hazards so they cannot make the journey. You know this, why suddenly the renewed interest in Garth?" The man asked and Fenderack chuckled a little manically.

"Nothing, nothing. Just I know Perdain and Tarnack are there."

"They can't move either Sire. Let them alone for the winter. Come Spring send Olsgurth back in force."

"Aye, Now leave me." Fenderack said and the man left looking confused.

"I knew you were lying, that makes so much more sense than people putting a mere peasant wielder on the throne!" Fenderack said feeling better and laying down again to sleep.

Tarnack and Perdain told Olsgurth what had happened and the old man laughed. "I'd bet my last dingy copper he really thinks you're lying Tarnack. He's only got half brained mercs left in the city, they'll convince him you're lying just to stay warm in the city. They won't budge in weather like this. But you have him off balance and he'll make even more mistakes now."

"That was the point General. I've fought in a few campaigns myself. Mainly against bandit gangs and swarms of creatures from the northern wastes but tactics are tactics and every wielder and wellspring is taught how to evaluate battles for the best chances of survival for all concerned. The minute we can read, we are reading past battles in histories. Even Perdain."

"Aye, it's true. Even though my father denied me most common things the one thing even he wouldn't consider doing is denying me education. It's just not done, we have gifts and we have to know how to use them effectively. Granted I do not have to learn how to do the things Tarnack had to. My gifts are instinctual. However, both Wielders and Wellsprings learn history until our heads are crammed full of the stories and all the details of the battles themselves. We have to work well as partners and we have to know what was done in the past that worked so we can apply it again in the future. Wellsprings have even more historical education than Wielders because their time is split also learning how not to blow themselves up." Perdain said and Tarnack laughed.

"Oh aye. One wrong spell or charm spoken out of order and that dome over the town right now would seal out everything, including air and we'd all suffocate. Simple things like lifting heavy objects that don't require a spell incantation are fairly easy, we will the power to our desires mentally. However, those thoughts have to be precise. For instance. I am thinking I wish to make my fork float." Tarnack said and the fork shot into the air and ricocheted off the ceiling.

“Now I am thinking I wish my spoon to be weightless and hover just above the table.” Tarnack said and the spoon lifted a few inches and remained.

“See, it’s precise. You have to be specific what you want the power to do. You cannot leave out even the smallest of details or else, like my poor fork, the power will get away from you and cause more damage in the end.”

“I’ve never had it explained to me quite so well before. It makes a lot of logical sense. No wonder wielder children are forbidden to use power until they are older and only use it with other wielders present when little.”

“Oh aye. We need our father’s there with us creating safety barriers around us or else we cause a lot of damage. I tried to use my powers once unsupervised as a child and learned the hard way why Dad was so adamant about me not using my gifts. All wielders usually find this out the hard way, the power is tempting when little. I wanted that apple in the tree and I willed the apple to fall from the tree. I ended up making them all fall, all at once and I was buried under hundreds of apples and let me tell you an apple falling on your head bloody hurts. I was lucky it was just a bunch of apples and not heavier or larger grapefruits or a crate of candy on a warehouse shelf or much worse. There have been instances where wielder boys ended up severely hurting themselves or killing themselves along with other innocent children goading him on in the process. It’s why our father’s tan our little bottoms red and raw when we disobey. Better a spanking than death.” Tarnack said and Olsгурth nodded.

Perdain chuckled. “Your mother told me about the apple escapade. Sadly however you learn a little slowly dearest.” Perdain teased and Tarnack chuckled.

“Oh gods, Aye. I was a right little daredevil when I was little. I gave my Dad his grey hair early I did and my backside was ever sore. I did eventually learn and stopped trying to do more than I was able to, and my father’s belt stayed around his middle and not smacking my bottom.” Tarnack winked and Olsгурth chuckled.

“Little Rebel then, big Rebel now. I think you just learned to channel that willpower more effectively lad.” Olsгурth winked and Tarnack laughed.

“You have a point. That’s pretty much exactly what I did, I learned to consider consequences to my actions. If I wanted something, instead of just immediately turning to my power for answers, I turned to my mind, which is what wielder training is all about. Training the mind first, trusting power secondary. It takes a mind to control power.” Tarnack said and Olsгурth nodded.

“Something Fenderack has never learned. He will fall like an autumn leaf.”

“Aye. He not only cannot control his power fully where he won’t make mistakes, but he has eighty wielders and wellsprings who DO know how facing him on top

of a full army to deal with. We've already gone over the plans, your men won't even have to enter the city at all. Just catch the stragglers fleeing and rounding them up. All the wellsprings will take up a full circle around the city and begin weakening Fenderack's power source by purifying the nodes. With so many of them, the nodes will purge of taint in no time at all. Once they do this, the wielders will have so much more to work with and we can go into they city itself and get citizens rounded up and cared for while Yancy, Pavel, Ednar, my Father and I head right to where we sense Fenderack and corner him. He has no chance. The march there will take longer than the battle itself. A day and the city is ours again. Once we sort out citizens from soldiers and get the lords all rounded up we can try them for conspiracy to mutiny. We already have the evidence. The hard part will be reorganizing the city and reestablishing the council. That is the part I fear. Not fighting Fenderack, I fear the bloody politics." Tarnack said and Perdain smiled.

"You have me there beloved. Fear not I am already working on your speeches and coming up with scenarios for you to study that I know you might face. The lords will be a big problem to deal with, yes. But we can deal with it, just one step at a time." Perdain said and Tarnack nodded.

"Aye. Just hope I don't knock some rude bugger's block off in the process. I have a bad habit of losing my patience with idiots."

Perdain just chuckled and Olsgurth laughed. "Tarnack, it's my job to knock blocks off and deal with the idiots. Don't step on my toes." Olsgurth winked and Tarnack grinned.

"I will learn to allow you the honor of giving spankings to wayward children Ollie. Never fear." Tarnack winked in return and dinner was finished in bright spirits.

“A Prince’s Destiny”

A Wielder and Wellspring Story

Author: D. Sanders

Act VIII - Liberation from Tyranny

Mid-winter came and along with it a joyous Mid-winter festival. There were no grand feasts, but people did gather over rations with cheer, more gifts were given and for ten days all training was suspended in favor of relaxation and prayer and thanks over life’s blessings.

Perdain had even managed to find time during the four weeks between his birthday and mid-winter to paint where Tarnack couldn’t see. When Tarnack was out with Olsгурth, Perdain had found a small room in the temple and had hidden himself away in those few hours to paint Tarnack a portrait for a min-winter gift. It was a portrait of Tarnack riding Stardust under a bright blue sky trough a field of mustard blossoms like he was riding on a carpet of golden sunshine. That was to be his tenth day gift, Perdain had also made pains to create smaller gifts for the first nine. Little sketches and love poems and whatever else he could think of that he could create with his own two hands. He still had a very difficult time spending Tarnack’s coppers and didn’t dare ask for coppers to spend on gifts for Tarnack. It just seemed wrong to Perdain when he was quite capable of making something from his heart. Tarnack had even given Perdain a purse with coppers, knowing Perdain would never ask for money and it still sat full in Perdain’s pleasantly full trunk of clothes and trinkets from his birthday.

Tarnack often found Perdain just sitting, looking at his treasures and crying when he thought no one was looking. He was so touched he’d written everyone personal thank you letters from the heart. This was a new side to Perdain that Tarnack cherished. This was the young boy finally obtaining things he had always wanted and had always been denied. This was the child still living in Perdain who finally got the ball on the string in his cup. This was the young man who didn’t have to look over his shoulder in fear anymore, the youth not afraid to show his emotions to his friends and loved ones. He could cry without punishment, laugh with true joy, smile when he was happy and dance when it suited him to. He was coming alive and blossoming. He was still the same Perdain, he still thought obsessively and still struggled to break those long ingrained habits of being overly frugal. He was still the most brilliant person Tarnack had ever met, but now he was also fun. He had learned and was learning how to be spontaneous and how to seize the joy in life.

Before Perdain would have never just leaped onto Tarnack’s back with a handful of snow to shove down his mate’s shirt in private let alone in public. Now he wasn’t afraid to just be human and play for the sake of playing. He would have never gone out with a dozen children to build snowmen in a field. Which had lead to his playful attack on his husband when he’d returned from a trip to the village. He hadn’t stiffened at the public display of affection when Tarnack wrestled his

mate from his back and dumped him into a snowdrift and proceeded to tickle and then kiss him in public. Just like all young lovers did occasionally. Being royal didn't negate humanity. Perdain had basically learned how to not be serious all the time and enjoy the moment like any other youth his age.

Especially during mid-winter. The Circlets were relegated to the trunk and when Tarnack and Perdain went out, they didn't go out as King and Prince-Consort, they went out to celebrate as a young bonded couple.

They walked hand in hand everywhere. Sharing cups of hot coffee in the market, looking at all the festive decorations together, dancing in the town square with the other couples, even laughing as Perdain fell on the ice as Tarnack tried teaching him how to ice skate.

Among the people who had come to the army, a score of bards also made the trek and the village was alive with music during mid-winter. Each bard trying desperately to corner Tarnack and Perdain for details so he could be the one to write the ballad about them that would be sung for centuries to come.

This was a side of Perdain that Tarnack was learning to love even more. It was vivacious and infectious with joy. Every smile, every laugh and every kiss from this youth made Tarnack's heart race with love and joy. Their bed at night had become more than delightful, it had become heaven on earth. There wasn't an inch left on Perdain's body Tarnack didn't know intimately or had loved fiercely.

There had been quite a few times Perdain himself had instigated their lovemaking and the first time Perdain had crawled on top of Tarnack's prone body and had impaled himself mercilessly upon his lover, Tarnack had to fight the urge to release immediately. Nothing was as sinfully erotic than to see Perdain's head thrown back, his hair loose about his shoulders and his own erection bobbing up and down as he bounced for all he was worth on top of Tarnack's manhood moaning and groaning in ecstasy, taking Tarnack into his body at his own pace until he was breathless and spent. Leaving Tarnack's stomach and chest coated with Perdain's efforts and falling back, spread wide for Tarnack to finish if he hadn't already from just Perdain's enthusiasm in their bed.

Having a young lover had very nice benefits. Having two young lovers in their prime of life made for much bedroom sport, sometimes several times in one night. Especially during mid-winter where they could sleep in the next day if they were particularly in the mood to experiment with each other the night before.

During the tenth day of Mid-winter Tarnack gifted Perdain with another ring, this one a gold bonding ring to wear as a symbol of their bond and he wept over Perdain's portrait. Perdain wasn't the only man to receive a ring for a gift either.

Over the many weeks in Garth, Rembrooke and Kassa had become more than lovers, it was plain to all they intended on remaining together permanently and Kassa was looking like a man half his age that day as he showed everyone the ring Rembrooke had given him that morning with a proposal of marriage. Which Kassa accepted immediately.

That very afternoon, they were standing in front of their brothers exchanging vows together and the deed was done and the marriage contract signed. When Rembrooke returned to the city with Tarnack and Perdain, Kassa would follow and leave Garth for the temple in the City to join his brother and husband there.

Perdain was overjoyed. At last Rembrooke had found someone to love again. This was not his first marriage, Perdain had always known Rembrooke had been married once before when he was very young. His first husband had also been a monk but had died after only two years of marriage and five years of partnership to a bad heart condition that had taken him very young. They had met when they were both novice monks at fifteen years old, wed at eighteen and Rembrooke buried him at twenty. For years Rembrooke had feared loving again and opening his heart to sorrow a second time, but Kassa had come along and two minds met and two hearts followed.

Kassa had a similar history. He had never married his lover, but had lost him after almost ten years together. His lover had been about ten years Kassa's senior and they had gotten together when Kassa had only been eighteen. Kassa's lover had been a kind and good man, a teacher like Rembrooke. He had died of a wasting sickness that had first attacked his muscles relegating him to a wheelchair the last three years of his life. Kassa had nursed him in those final years and finally the sickness claimed him and Kassa had buried his long time lover on his twenty-eight birthday.

Like Rembrooke he had spent many years afraid to commit his heart again to someone else, but the Gods had brought them together and hearts had been renewed.

Rembrooke was almost forty and would celebrate his own birthday in three weeks and Kassa would turn thirty-six in the spring and both men were acting like they were eighteen all over again as they shared a bonding cake with their closest friends. Perdain smiling and crying with joy and congratulating them both profusely and promising them to paint them a portrait they could hang in their rooms in the temple in the city after they got home as a belated bonding day gift. Since the proposal and the actual bonding had taken place within hours and no one had been prepared to toast the couple.

Once midwinter was over, training stepped up a notch, the time they would be heading out to Pernath to reclaim the city was nearing and Tarnack and Olsгурth wanted everything prepared for that final push come first thaw. They wanted

every eventuality prepared for, even if they didn't expect any of the men to actually have to draw their swords.

For the first time in his life, Perdain had things to pack for travel, and everything from his paints to his books and trinkets was carefully stowed away securely in his beautiful trunk in addition to a second matching trunk they'd purchased for his and Tarnack's clothes. These they added to the back of the ox cart given to Rembrooke and Kassa by the temple as a bonding gift. All of Kassa's life packed securely in plain crates covered in tarps and his room was bare to the walls for the first time in almost thirty years. The Royal trunks were added to this cart for safety since the ox drawn cart would be pulling up the rear with the supply wagons. Rembrooke and Kassa would be nowhere near the actual fighting if any took place. Monks did not fight and were not expected to, even if Olsгурth insisted on Rembrooke and Kassa both carrying long slender lightweight rapier thrusting swords for their own personal defense if needed.

A second ox cart was obtained for the healers to ride in alongside Rembrooke and Kassa. They too were not expected to fight nor push on foot during a march. They were not trained soldiers and thus accommodations were made for their comfort. Their duties came after battle and they needed to be sharp and rested.

Tarnack and Perdain had Stardust and Sundance saddled and would ride lead with Olsгурth. Tarnack to Perdain's left and Olsгурth to his right, sandwiching him in-between for protection as well as for visual aesthetics. Any of the smaller villages between Garth and the Capitol of Pernath City would see the import of the Travelers. Perdain had designed Tarnack's Kingly crest and colors and the Seamstresses of Garth had outdone themselves creating the banner that Pavel and Yancy would carry directly behind Tarnack and Perdain. Two matching Crest flags on long poles flying the King's colors.

The crest itself was a shield split diagonally with a black stripe. Within the wide stripe a golden wheat sheaf motif to represent the common people. In the upper half of the crest on a field of red was the wielder insignia. A blazing golden sun and in the lower half of the diagonal was a field of blue with a shining white full moon and stars. The crest itself showing Tarnack was the People's King and represented everyone, from the peasants to Wielders and Wellsprings. Everyone united under a common banner and a common King. This was a new dynasty and a new monarchy and the King would no longer represent a single family line with a personal royal crest. This was the new crest that all Kings after Tarnack would bear, a King who swore to protect everyone equally and fairly. A crest that represented equal justice for all.

In addition to the crest flags, both Stardust and Sundance had full livery that bore the Royal crest draped on their flanks and all four pairs of Tarnack's appointed

King's Own Wielders and Wellsprings each had a black tabard bearing the crest on their chests. Perdain and Tarnack's tabards were white to separate them from their sworn men and women and they too bore the new crest on their chests.

Olsгурth did not wear a tabard, but his shield had been painted with the crest by Perdain himself and he wore a red knotted rope on both shoulders to indicate he was the commander and chief and General of the King's Royal army.

For uniformity all the men wore simple plain tabards over their clothes. Red for Wielders and white for wellsprings, their patches sewn onto their breasts and blue for the soldiers. Eventually they would be given the royal crest in a patch as well, but time and money had been in short supply and it was hard enough outfitting so many men and women in one season. They were simple and uniform which from a distance was impressive and would allow the men to recognize each other in a field of battle. The red standing out most on purpose, the wielders needed to be recognizable at a long distance and the white in an end of winter landscape would blend into the remaining snow on the ground. Again to disguise the weaker parties who were vital on a battle field but should not be targets. A wellspring tabard in fair weather would be green, again to hide them from an archer's view.

The healers wore brown robes with several deep pockets to carry supplies within. This again for ease in detection when they were needed on the field. They had all been altered monks robes and it was Kassa's idea. For years he had sewn into his oversized robes extra pockets and he was a walking first-aid station at all times. He was in charge of his healers and dressed them to his sense of expediency and efficiency. Each healer also had a hard case on a long strap to sling over their shoulders, again at Kassa's direction. This carried all the medicines, ointments, wound cleaners, sterilizing alcohols and various other breakable bottles that could leak if jangling around loose in pockets. The lid of the case flipped open and held precise surgical tools and implements. Sharp scalpels, scissors, picks, tweezers and needles and sterile wound thread in little custom pockets. Each medical kit was put together by Kassa himself fashioned again after his own and he had a crate in his wagon of extra supplies he'd been brewing all winter to refill bottles as they emptied.

Once everyone was in their places, the mounted wielders and wellsprings would flank their assigned troops and soldiers who were also mounted, first in line behind the King's Own contingent. Next the main army on foot and the same for those wielders and wellsprings used to traveling on foot would flank their foot soldier regiments. Four bonded pairs had been assigned to protect the children, healers and monks and all the important supply wagons at the rear of the procession. Once everyone was in line and at attention ready to march, Tarnack began the shield spell at the front of the line, and back to each of his wielders in succession until it reached the Wielders and Wellsprings pulling up the very rear. Creating a dome once again to protect the non-gifted in the ranks from not only

chilly end of winter, early spring climes, but from were-beasts and stray arrows should there be any to contend with during their march West.

Ednar, riding directly behind Yancy and Pavel and next to his parents and his own wellspring Randa as part of the King's Own contingent, held up a bugle to his lips when Tarnack raised his arm and he signaled the march and not too badly since he'd only been practicing the bugle calls for the past few weeks. Tarnack looked over his shoulder and winked at his older brother who just grinned as the horses began the march toward the City Gates. The whole journey was expected to take six days; they were not going to push fast to conserve the army's resources and spare feet from unnecessary paces.

As they headed toward the city, and through several smaller villages, everyone came out to cheer and wave as the army passed through. Several people, refugees from the City, weeping with joy seeing the new King they'd all heard about via rumor mill and gossip wave and nod as he passed.

The outlaw Tarnack, protector of the people and the People's King rode tall on his mount. The famous war stallion Stardust who proudly shook his mane, snapped his tail and snorted bobbing his head at the people and Tarnack grinned over at Perdain. "He's such a vain prig isn't he? He's a handsome brute and he knows it." Tarnack chuckled at Stardust's antics whenever they passed through a village.

"Love have you been watching Sundance? She's no better. I think we need to put mirrors in their stalls." Perdain replied and Sundance only whinnied in response seeming to agree with her wellspring's notion she should be given a mirror to preen into.

"All right my beautiful lady. Shall I get you ribbons, bows and bells for your mane and tail too? I know you already like it when I paint your hooves my darling." Perdain added with a laugh reaching down to stroke her neck lovingly. He adored his beautiful girl and he did paint her hooves gold like she'd had when he'd gotten her and had begun adding little decorative touches as well. She currently had golden hooves with red roses added on a whim just before they'd headed out and she would be overdue for a new painting after this journey was over.

As the villagers jockeyed for a good view of the infamous Tarnack they were equally eager to view the Prince Royal Perdain. Word had spread he was a beauty and bonded to Tarnack and everyone was dying to see the King and Prince Consort in the flesh.

Rumor had it Tarnack had swooped into the City the night the chaos began and rescued the Prince from the temple and on their flight west had bonded to each

other. Rumor also said that Perdain had been helping Tarnack in secret for years and in a stormy passion they had bonded the minute they laid eyes on each other for the first time. The tall rogue outlaw wielder Tarnack and the beautiful wellspring Prince trapped in the temple was fodder for many a romantic tale and Rumor, while slightly exaggerated, was fairly close to reality.

Young girls sighed dreamily as Tarnack passed by, young, handsome and rugged as all the rumors said he was and gasps and murmurings from men and women alike could be heard as they caught their first sight of Perdain as he rode beside his wielder husband. His dark hair braided over his shoulder and his silver circlet on his brow gleaming in the sunshine. His beautiful face kind and his eyes deeply loving as he smiled and waved at the gathered crowds. Very young, fey and elegantly beautiful beside his powerful and strong wielder which fueled even more romantic murmurings from young and old alike.

They could just see in their minds Perdain's daring rescue being held in Tarnack's strong and protective arms as they fled the horrors of the city. They could envision the rapture of bonding by the Gods Will, they saw a future of a strong wielder king and gentle wellspring of blood royal lineage leading them to the end of tyranny and into a new beginning. It didn't hurt either the bards among the ranks were fueling said fodder with romantic love ballads already spreading like wildfire throughout all of Holst.

About twenty leagues out of Pernath Tarnack signaled the halt and indicated the army should break into their troops and spread out encircling the city as planned, staying well out of visual range under heavy shielded cloaks from the wielders. Once everyone was in their compass positions wielders would signal the silent march and they would appear en masse surrounding the city walls.

The mounted ranks with the King and Prince Consort on the main road leading into Pernath from the East.

It took several hours for all to report they were in position and Tarnack sent the telepathic broadcast to press forward the past twenty leagues and by mid-day on the sixth day Pernath was surrounded by seventy-five thousands soldiers and the buglers were trumpeting the call to War.

The city gates were shut, the army had been spotted and defenses were quickly raised. The temple bells were ringing signaling the citizens to hide or come to the temple for protection.

Tarnack stood in his saddle and yelled to the few pitiful guards manning the main gates. "Tell the murderous boy playing King that Tarnack, the People's King has

Come as promised. His life is forfeit and all those who do not surrender immediately will join him in hell!"

Fenderack was terrified, that morning he had awakened to a sunny spring day and had begun feeling the power in his nodes strengthening but not with taint, they were rapidly purifying. He felt the presence of a host of wellsprings tapping into the nodes one after the other, the clearest and strongest of them Perdain himself. His mind shut and blocked from Fenderack by a powerful shield of protection that stank of the power of Tarnack.

The bells in the temple were ringing and the streets were noisy with traffic and people running for cover. Fenderack's mercenary with the eye patch practically shattering the King's door down without knocking. "SIRE! The army is spotted about five leagues and all around the city in every direction! The city is surrounded! The men with long viewers show a royal crest and by the gods the Outlaw Tarnack is on the main road coming from the east! They spotted his mount and he's coming in like a KING! Flee your majesty, you don't have enough protection, we'll be overrun in minutes once they reach the gates!" The large man said and Fenderack fell out of bed, all this time he was sure Tarnack had been lying, bluffing. Now he tasted true fear, so many wellsprings only meant an equal or greater number of wielders in addition and close to their mates. Perdain and Tarnack, his own army turned against him.

He showed his true age, a boy in panic and his mind frantic. It was all well and good playing King, but when faced with war without an army and without wielders and wellsprings under his command he was alone. He threw up a shield around himself and fled the palace, hiding himself under a rough wool cloak he hid himself under the hood and followed the citizens into the temple. He would use them as a shield of protection, no wielder would raise a hand to him when innocents were in the line of fire.

The population was herded down into the cellars then into the vast catacombs beneath the temple. Monks smiling as they led the way. "Fear not good people, King Tarnack is here and will not harm the innocent. He fights for you this day to free you from Fenderack's evil. The Gods Will delivered him as your champion and all pray for victory for King Tarnack!"

Fenderack fumed but stayed quiet and hidden. Making his way through the people and back through the catacombs, remembering Olsgruth telling him the catacombs ran into the city sewers and then into the White Rush River. This was the way Perdain had escaped! If he could make it out he could double back behind Tarnack and Perdain and at least take them out too before he was caught.

He might lose this battle and his very life, but not without having the last laugh and taking his brother with him. With Perdain dead, Tarnack would follow and no peasant would sit on the Throne of Holst!

With this demented and foolish plan in mind born from fear Fenderack slipped away into the darkness and followed the sounds of the River.

The four gates that lead into the city at North, south, east and west began rising, and not from within. The power of so many wielders using spells set the mechanisms to turning of their own accord and it was a futile effort to try and jam them closed. Mercenaries, knowing losing odds, furious with lack of pay, and without loyalty to a boy who had hired them and then made them pawns deserted their posts and stood holding arms up in surrender as the army pushed through the gates, rounding them up as prisoners to be questioned later while securing the city a street at a time. Tarnack leading the eastern soldiers with his King's own contingent shouting orders while Perdain's job was to try and locate his brother in the confusion. Everyone knew even Fenderack wasn't foolish enough to sit and wait in the palace to be easily captured.

::Tarnack, he's close I can feel his fear, I could swear he's right under our very feet!:: Perdain sent and Tarnack pulled back to the rear of his men to join Perdain at the gate still mounted on Sundance.

"Show me love." Tarnack said following Perdain's mental connection to the source of fear. "He's in the sewer I bet. Trying to get out the way you did. Is he that stupid?"

"Aye love, he is that." Perdain sighed as he and Tarnack turned to face East and down the road that ran beside the White Rush River.

::King's Own! To me! We have the mouse in the trap!:: Tarnack broadcast and soon his own men were behind him as he they trotted out to where the sewer emptied into the river. They lined up facing the entrance on the road across the river, mounted soldiers taking up positions behind the King's Own contingent and all waited silently.

::He's here!:: Perdain broadcast as a wet clogged figure stumbled out of the grate.

"I BIND AND SEAL YOU!" Tarnack shouted and like a rock Fenderack froze in place, his eyes wide with shock and fear.

Tarnack dismounted and stood across the river facing Fenderack, reduced to a trembling teenager. Filthy from the sewer and frightened as he stared death in the eyes.

“You really are nothing more than a foolish boy Fenderack. This is where, greed, hate, malice and murder brings you child. When you act upon selfish desires without thought to consequences the consequences catch up to you in the end boy.” Tarnack said as Perdain dismounted and joined his husband.

“Brother, the list of your crimes stretch back so far it is impossible to list them all. Our father was blinded to them and our mother wept over them. Pain and torture to many you have caused and now you will face judgment.” Perdain said standing tall and Fenderack even in his fear sneered.

“Catamite whore you were born to be! No real man bends over in submission! You’re nothing more than a bed toy and come catcher for other men! The lords will never put your kind on the throne Perdain!”

“I BIND YOU ALSO TO SILENCE!” Tarnack growled, he’d heard enough and he waded across the shallow section of river and back handed Fenderack hard across the face, grabbing his shirt front and getting nose to nose so Fenderack could see the fury in his eyes.

“You vile piece of human filth! The shit in your mouth stinks! Think I am less of a man do you because I bed my own gender? Care to take me on boy? No you don’t, I can see and taste the fear in you. The measure of man is not found in his bedroom you idiot. If it was, how should we judge you? He who beds girls too young to be from their mother’s skirts! Child rapist and murder you disgust me!” Tarnack said kneeling Fenderack with great force in his groin, toppling him over in agony before Tarnack grabbed him and dragged him through the water and tossing him belly over Stardust’s saddle before hog tying him to it. Humiliating him publicly to the laughter of many as Tarnack led Stardust back into the city and to the town square where a stockade was erected and Fenderack was shoved into it to wait for public sentencing.

People laughing and jeering at Fenderack as the Seven lords were rounded up and brought kicking and screaming into the square to be shackled and penned beside Fenderack.

Once they were all gathered, Tarnack climbed up on a hastily erected platform with Perdain at his side and he held his hands up for silence.

“Pernath is LIBERATED FROM TRYANNY! THE MURDER FENDERACK AND HIS SUPPORTERS ARE BEFORE YOU FOR JUDGEMENT MY PEOPLE!” Tarnack’s booming voice carried and the crowd cheered and when they silenced again Tarnack continued.

“Fenderack, son of Pendergar. Tyrant of Pernath, You are charged with willful and malicious torture of Wellspring Perdain that spanned sixteen years of torment. You are charged with the Murders of King Pendergar and Queen

Gergaine. You are charged with the rape, torture and murder of child wellspring Alisada, the willful and malicious imprisonment and intent of rape and torture of wellsprings Yulona, Gaeda, Friedia and Mundigale which led to their suicide to escape. You are charged with neglect of your people for selfish personal gain and if stupidity were a crime I'd charge you with that too. How plead you?" Tarnack said and got a small chuckle from the crowd in response to his last statement.

"I do not have to answer to you peasant!" Fenderack snapped and Tarnack sighed.

"Then answer to me brother! HOW PLEAD YOU?" Perdain asked, his eyes deadly serious and Fenderack just lifted his head and growled.

"By the law of the land you are peasant bound to your master wielder whore. I answer not to you either."

"Then so be it, refusal to answer will not spare you judgment. The crimes are proven and irrefutable. You have forfeited your right to defense and therefore by the Will of the Gods that I have vowed to serve first under the heavens, I, King Tarnack of the People, do hereby sentence you to death. To be carried out immediately." Tarnack said stepping down off the platform to face Fenderack.

"You have a moment of silent Prayer given you before I send your soul out of your body." Tarnack said and Fenderack spat on his feet and Tarnack sighed.

"Then I pray for you, that your soul finds mercy." Tarnack said laying his hand on Fenderack's brow.

"I Bind your Heart to stop and your breath to cease and in death set your soul free." Tarnack said and Fenderack slumped in the stocks and he was removed by Pavel and Yancy and draped in a black death shroud as he was laid in state on the ground.

Tarnack turned to the lords quivering in the stocks, silent and afraid.

"You have all been charged with aiding and abetting mutiny. Knowingly and Willfully working with the condemned Fenderack in overthrowing the monarchy and aiding in the deaths of King Pendergar and Queen Gergaine and while your hands did not the killing, you had knowledge that could have spared their lives. How plead you?" Tarnack asked and his eye twitched as seven men turned into seven simpering and whining fools. Lords reduced to crying and begging. Blaming everything and everyone but themselves. Claiming fear of Fenderack made them do it, claiming innocence, claiming ignorance, doing everything but taking responsibility for their own actions. Tarnack despised men like this, he held up his hand for silence.

“I will ask again how plead you and this time I BIND YOU ALL TO TRUTH” He said and this time he got the answers he knew were correct. One man was in debt and had wanted his cousin’s lands so he signed the law taking her wellspring rights and annexing her possessions throwing her out into the streets. The next hated Pendergar and hated all wielders in general and saw a chance to take out a boy king and purge the thrown of wielders until he realized Fenderack while young was diabolical and he’d lost the nerve to kill him. The next was a downright bigot who hated all non-breeders on principle and thought Perdain a threat to his masculinity and he’d never swear fealty to a non-breeder catamite on the throne. The fourth was a greedy bastard and had been taking kick backs from black market trade and had a promise with Fenderack to split the profits if Fenderack turned blind eyes to his dealings. The sixth was indeed a justifiable idiot. He only backed Fenderack because they had went to school together and Fenderack had bullied him into it. This man would have a lighter sentence than the rest. The Seventh man was a slave trader and that shocked even Tarnack. He’d been selling girls and boys as sexual slaves to a host of lords and he listed them all in gruesome detail. He’d been the one supplying Fenderack his girls for years and in the lists of men he named as his clients the sheer magnitude of the implications rocked everyone to their knees. There were going to be more trials once that list could be gone through and those lords and a few ladies brought to justice and the slave trade abolished.

Once they had all finished speaking and their faces frozen with terror knowing they had confessed to heinous crimes Tarnack called for silence again from the crowd who were booing and hissing.

The first five men, Tarnack first stripped of their lands and titles, the wealth to be liquidated and added to the crown treasury to be used as restitution for the poor and suffering the people had gone through, once the assets were totaled and accounted for, the monies would be divided. One third would remain in the crown treasury to be used for Charity donations, one-third would be given to the soldiers who fought to capture these men as a reward and the final third would be immediately given back to the people of Pernath City. Issued in hard copper stipends from the crown they could come and collect on an appointed day yet to be set.

In addition to this liquidation of their wealth and loss of all titles. The former lords were sentenced to twenty-years hard labor in the city prison as part of work gangs and would work rebuilding the city that they helped destroy. Their remaining families would be given a small portion of the liquidated earnings to begin lives anew. Wives and small children receiving a larger settlement than those with grown men for children who could find employment with their educations. Their wives would be the sole beneficiaries of monetary compensation for losing homes, titles and wealth. If their grown children would

not take them into their homes and support them, the crown would offer aide in helping them find work that provided room and board.

These haughty women in the crowd wept, some fainted dramatically others only looked resigned, knowing in their hearts their husbands had brought this fate down around them all and they too could have done something to stop their husbands long before it came to this state.

The Sixth man was sentenced to the loss of his titles, and two thirds of his wealth. That wealth would be used as the others as restitution to the people. He would, unlike the others be allowed to keep his home for his young wife and children it's value to be counted as part of the one-third of his wealth he was retaining, not in addition to, and the little wealth left over that they retained could be used for it's maintenance. He was sentenced to two-years hard labor with the others and would be released back to his family at the end of a two year sentence and would be expected to seek employment to maintain his family or choose to sell his estates and move them to a more affordable standard of living.

The last lord for his traffic in human flesh and slavery lost not only his titles, lands and wealth like the first six, but also received a life sentence of hard-labor without possibility of parole. He was also magically castrated for the sexual crimes he'd committed. Tarnack bound him to a life of impotency on top of everything else then called his men to take the prisoners away to the jail on the western side of the city.

Tarnack then called for the people to disperse for the day and return to their homes and as he and Perdain reclaimed the palace he vowed to issue daily reports of progress to be posted on the town square board.

Tarnack then had Olsgruth appoint men to round up the list of Lords named as purchasers of slaves to be tried. He also ordered a proclamation that the council was reinstated and that all former council seat lords, not already relieved of duty or on the lists of slavers, should immediately return to their homes and should be ready to resume business in a fortnight. There was much to be done in reestablishing order from the winter of chaos Holst had endured.

It was to a riot of cheers that Tarnack, Perdain on his arm, ascended the stairs of the palace as King and Prince Consort of Pernath. The City was cleansed and reclaimed, the guilty punished and a New Era for Holst began on the first day of Spring.

It took many long weeks to finally return to some semblance of order. Tarnack would fall into bed every night mentally exhausted from arguing his voice raw day after day in council. First it had been to argue his right to claim the throne as

King. Oh the lords were not happy that a mere peasant had risen to the throne. Nor the fact that Perdain sat beside him, the one person even they had tried to prevent from sitting in a position of power.

What they couldn't argue was law, which stated quite clearly for more than seven hundred years that when a tyrant ruled the people could elect a new King by popular vote and if said King could legally gain control, he would be recognized as the Gods choice. This law had been in effect since the time of King Rigel, who like Tarnack, had been a peasant wielder and had overthrown the dictator Wissen, the persecutor of the faith. From that time on, only a wielder had held the throne of Holst. Which had always sat like a bad thorn in non-gifted lordly sides, as evidenced by the disrespect Tarnack was receiving until Perdain stood and did what Perdain never did.

He not only interrupted a lord in mid-speech, he dressed him down verbally and threw law after law in the man's face until he silenced and sat down in shock that Perdain wasn't just a pretty face, he was vastly more intelligent than all the lords combined.

Once the battle to be recognized as the legal King and Prince-Consort was sorted out, then came the constant inner bickering over laws and questioning Tarnack's ruling that the wealth seized from the convicted be given to the people, instead per say to the coffers of the lords who had endured such a horrible winter in their country estates. Weren't they victims too?

The greed grated on Tarnack's nerves and if it wasn't for Perdain keeping him calm and in check with mental conversation and soothing his fury internally he'd have more than once gotten up and physically beaten the man for being a sheer asshole or an idiot, or both.

Then once all the details of order were hammered out the topic of the wellspring laws came to the table and as predicted not a single lord budged. Perdain had forecast this eventuality months earlier and he'd been right. The only concession the lords gave was instead of the wealth of the female wellsprings going to the crown, it would go to the next in line in the immediate or extended family. At least this way, more often than not they'd not be turned from their homes, which was a miniscule victory for wellspring rights but at least a victory. Male wellsprings however were still anathema unless bonded and then considered Gods Chosen to bond to a wielder but he'd still be the sole property of his wielder. He would have no rights above any other wellspring save for basic human rights equal to little more than a peasant unless his wielder was a lord himself, then he could share his husband's title just as a female would. However, he would still be forced to live a life separated from his family and used as a public wellspring until he bonded. He would only gain the rights of a female in accordance to his wielder's rank and only after bonding, before then the law stated he was anathema and public communal property without rank, rights or station.

He would however, have some modicum of protection. Another small victory gained by Perdain. Like all wellsprings, it was forbidden to use him until he was of age, limited use after age ten for education purposes for the child to learn his own nature and full wellspring use at age thirteen or puberty if not reached by age thirteen. He would be protected by the brotherhood of the faith, educated, fed and clothed in comfort by the temple. He would absolutely be provided without fail, a room of his own, three meals a day, daily education and free reign of the temple archive where he was living and unguarded contact with the monks within the temple dormitories. The brotherhood of the faith would be instructed on how to teach a wellspring about his gifts and subsequently he would be educated thoroughly on the aspects of his nature. They'd keep him sequestered from the public as part of the law, but that was where they drew the line.

The Brotherhood absolutely refused to deprive a child of all human contact calling it inhuman punishment for simply being born male. The Brotherhood refused to acknowledge the writ of anathema stating no child born under the heavens is anathema based on Godly Edicts. Law may proclaim him Anathema, but Gods Edict superceded law in their religious faith. Especially those born with Gods Given gifts. They would not recognize or call being born a male wellspring a crime.

Rembrooke as part of the council as representative of the Brotherhood of the Faith pushed the most for the temple to have carte blanche in how they raised the male wellsprings. He refused to 'jail' these boys as one of the gods Children too. He was fire and brimstone in his sermon, spouting ancient edicts and shaking quite a few souls as he did so. Perdain mused Rembrooke had missed his calling as a politician and told him so in private. Rembrooke just claimed he was learning from Perdain right along with Tarnack during council sessions.

The lords finally conceded and the laws were altered to reflect the temple had total jurisdiction over male wellsprings. They also made a stipulation that ruffled Rembrooke's feathers but he conceded in order to gain the right to protect male wellsprings. It was required of the monks to collect male wellsprings from parents who refused to turn them in themselves and report the parents to the council to be fined. Rembrooke hated this rider to his petition, but agreed to it in order to gain the power to shelter innocent boys.

Perdain also gained a smaller further victory in the fight to protect male wellsprings. No parents, even if they tried to hide their children would ever be condemned as traitors. That clause was obliterated from the law. Perdain won that victory by playing on the Lord's own parental instincts to protect their own children. "It is not traitorous to wish to keep your flesh and blood to your heart and arms. It is human nature to rebel in order to protect a life you created." He argued and finally swayed all members to see his logical reasoning. Apart from a fine that was lessened to only twenty thousand as opposed to one hundred and

fifty, no other actions would be taken against the parents for simply loving their son. The fine would still shatter a poor man and Tarnack argued himself blue to get it lessened even further, but twenty was still better than one hundred and fifty, but to already obscenely wealthy men, that number seemed like pocket change and they would not budge any further.

They were small victories in the grand scheme of things, but at least partial ones. In time perhaps they would have a council of lords sitting in Pernath that would listen first to the people and act accordingly, Perdain knew however it would not be in his lifetime. Small victories were better than none. Old biases would take a long time to change, a very long time.

By midsummer, things had returned to a somewhat natural balance. Tarnack still despised council sessions but thankfully now they were no longer daily. Once a fortnight to go over petitions and jointly go over any problems to work out solutions. The liquidated assets of the men Tarnack sentenced had been calculated to fifteen million coppers and then separated into thirds and the temple agreed to hand out the small purses of money to the people. Fifty coppers to all one hundred thousand adult citizens on the census of Pernath City, Sixty- six coppers to the seventy-five thousand soldiers as a bonus and the rest was divided into charity donations. One million given to the brotherhood of the Faith to be used as they saw fit to give to the needy. One million to the orphanage in the city, one million to the healer's guild to be used to tend the ailing and sick, one million to be used as scholarships for the underprivileged to attend school. That was Perdain's idea, hating that so many children were uneducated and sent to work the minute they could carry something and walk at the same time. The final million going to build said school for the lower class children next to the temple where the monks volunteered to staff it with teachers.

This angered a lot of lords who thought education a waste on peasants but Perdain didn't care, he argued that everyone had the potential to be the brilliant surgeon who saved a lord's wife in childbirth or saved the lord himself from his debauchery. Would they deny their possible savior the education that might one day save their lives? This logic lessened the grumbling and the school was already being built.

Occasionally, Tarnack and Perdain would slip out of the palace in the evenings incognito and head over to the cock-n-bull to meet with Haddy, Dean, Wren, Rembrooke and Kassa for a friendly dinner and chat with friends. Tarnack, while proving to be a remarkable King, was still just a simple man who liked simple stew and bread for dinner that stuck to his ribs and didn't require anything but the bread to sop up his dinner with. He liked a good bit of ale down his gob where he could belch if it suited him too without raising eyebrows. He liked being able to talk openly with friends over mundane things without fear that people were

looking to corner him in a political nightmare of red tape. He liked to hear filthy jokes and bellow with laughter over the bawdy humor. He liked to sit and drink and relax and unwind. He would ever be a peasant at heart and that was what Perdain loved best about his husband.

He was ever true to himself and he'd never let his rank go to his very level head. He would never forget where he came from which made him the perfect People's King.

As Summer turned to autumn again and back to winter, Tarnack threw a private feast in honor of Perdain's seventeenth birthday, where all their closest friends gathered at the palace for Perdain's favorite dinner of lamb chops, new potatoes and mint sauce, with sweet wine and a large chocolate and peppermint cake for dessert.

It was a closed affair and once dinner was over, everyone retired to the drawing room for an evening of logic board games and charades. Perdain insisting he did not need gifts, the fun with friends was more than enough, but they all brought token gifts anyway just because they loved Perdain and he them in return.

Mid-winter the palace once again hosted a fabulous ten day celebration of dancing, games, feasts and music. Everyone was full of cheer, the city was bright and alive again and it hardly seemed like just a year ago they were in Garth, eating rationed food and just trying to make it through the winter.

On the tenth Day, Tarnack was awakened by his husband with a showering of affection and lovemaking before he was bestowed with his 'special' presents from Perdain. Perdain had painted a formal portrait of Tarnack's parents for him to hang in their room along with a bonding ring for Tarnack to wear that matched the one Tarnack had given Perdain the previous year. Tarnack was more than touched and let Perdain slip the ring on his finger with a vow he'd never take it off.

Perdain's gifts came in the form he liked best. Books, beautifully bound in leather and full of printed pages for Perdain's growing private library in their suite. From Poetry, to pictured annals of flora and fauna to the most recent fanciful novels to whatever topic of study Perdain was currently interested in. In addition to the books, Tarnack had taken a serious liking to seeing Perdain dressed elegantly in jewels and a new circlet in silver studded in sapphires was gifted to his beloved.

They had come a very long way together in the past four years since they first exchanged letters and love was what had helped them succeed together. A love which only grew stronger as the years passed by. No matter the stress of ruling, no matter the frustration of politics, no matter the daily trials they had to face, when they faced them together, anything seemed possible.

Only time would tell if what they fought so hard to achieve would be remembered and only time would show their efforts had not been in vain.

Regardless of what the future held, there was one thing that was certain. Love had brought them together and Love always stood the test of time.

“A Prince’s Destiny”
A Wielder and Wellspring Story
Author: D. Sanders
Act IX - The New Heir (Epilogue)

For nearly ten years King Tarnack ruled Holst and in those years had become more than beloved by his people. Taxes were always reasonable and justified with explanations, he was always fair when it came to laws that affected everyone and the palace gates were always open to any and everyone who came to the City seeking justice.

He had always claimed he held his vows sacred and he meant them. First he served the Gods, second the people, third the land. If he disagreed with the council he fought tooth and nail to honor his vows and protect the people he’d vowed to protect. There wasn’t a single person in Holst that didn’t think Tarnack was the greatest King to sit the throne since King Rigel restored religious freedom to the people hundreds of centuries earlier.

However, as much as Tarnack was loved and respected, Prince Perdain was still the gossip around every rumor mill. For years the bards sang of his beauty, his kindness, his grace and wisdom. They sang songs so often that not a single person didn’t know every line to “The Prince in Peril and the Outlaw King”. The most famous of the many love ballads that had sprung up after the war.

Ladies gossiped over tea that Perdain was the most elegant beauty in all of Holst and that it was rumored the King often had his beloved wear nothing but jewels in their chambers because he never wanted Perdain to hide his beauty from his eyes. Perdain often rolled his eyes when he caught wind of those rumors and would comment under his breath that it would be awfully cold running around in nothing but rocks. Tarnack however would just waggle his eyebrows and mention he wouldn’t mind Perdain running around constantly naked in their rooms and he’d usually have whatever book was in Perdain’s hands chucked at him for being ‘cheeky’.

Rumor also got strange and outlandish on occasion. Even Perdain had to laugh at the notion he was really woman in disguise because no man was ever as beautiful as he was. He was half tempted after hearing that one to go skinny dipping in the public fountains to prove he had his own tackle firmly dangling between his legs. Again Tarnack seconded the notion and had the annals of fur trade in the Northeast thrown at his head.

It was a balmy summer afternoon when Tarnack, celebrating his thirty-third birthday, lazed on a blanket in a country field. Sundance and Stardust were happily chewing up grass not far away and Perdain was helping Kassa and Mundy make lemonade in Mundy’s kitchen. She and Pavel had moved just outside of the city to a small village where they could raise their horses and start

a family. Mundy was heavily pregnant with their first child who was due in a little less than two months. Rembrooke was looking at the new foals with Pavel and Tarnack was comfortably dozing listening to the insects buzz and chirp. He was glad to be away from the city for the day. Especially the council.

They were now putting serious pressure on Tarnack and Perdain to name an heir. Perdain felt the sting most in these sessions, the lords made it very clear they were not happy that Perdain would be unable to produce an heir for the King and every year that passed without Tarnack naming an heir just added more stress on Perdain's shoulders who bore the brunt of the burden and guilt.

Tarnack would always comfort Perdain at night when he cried, feeling useless as mate when the snide comments from Lords sat under his skin until he could purge them in private.

At Twenty-six Perdain was still as beautiful and fair as he had been at sixteen. Even more so now in Tarnack's opinion. Gone was the waif of a boy and in his place was a lithe and perfectly honed young man. He had filled out just enough to make all those boyish planes curve into very masculine and supple muscles. He was slightly taller, standing to Tarnack's broad shoulders now as opposed to his chest. His shoulders still slender but noticeably wider but his hips were still deliciously narrow and his posterior was still round and smooth, just the way Tarnack had always liked his men before. Perdain was more than his soul mate, he was also Tarnack's ideal vision of male perfection.

He was dressed in a sleeveless tunic and riding pants and the leather formed around his backside, showcasing his wonderful assets and Tarnack was staring at him shamelessly as he helped carry the lemonade back out to where Tarnack was being lazy in the heat. "You're still so damn beautiful, if we didn't have company out here beloved you'd be in serious trouble." Tarnack drawled and Perdain chuckled as he sat on the blanket with his husband.

"I'm always in trouble with you Tarnack. You're ever in heat." Perdain winked running a cool glass over Tarnack's bare chest and letting the perspiration off the glass trickle over a nipple making Tarnack shiver.

"Beast." Tarnack said taking the glass and Perdain just leaned over and kissed him.

"Aye. Who taught me to be so I wonder?" Perdain winked.

Kassa was brining out glasses of lemonade to Rembrooke and Pavel over by the horse fence when a sudden shriek from Mundy and a loud crash inside their house startled them all, then sudden terror as Pavel turned and then fell, like he was snuffed like a candle. Rembrooke and Kassa both at his side trying in vain to revive him as Perdain and Tarnack raced into the house.

Mundy was lying crumpled at the bottom of the stairs, her neck broken. A simple fall had killed her and Perdain was sobbing holding her in his arms and rocking her back and forth.

“THE BABY! GET KASSA! THE BABY IS STILL ALIVE I FEEL IT!” Perdain wept and Tarnack, his own eyes blinded with tears went racing to get Kassa and dragged him in the house.

Kassa, never without his medical kit was right on Tarnack’s heels and Rembrooke stayed with Pavel and said prayers over his suddenly lifeless body.

Perdain rocked back and forth, gripping Mundy’s lifeless hand as Kassa cut away her tunic to bear her belly.

“Too soon Perdain, the babe is not even eight months.”

“I can’t hold the light much longer Kassa! Please do it now or we lose them all!” Perdain said and Kassa nodded and cut the child free from Mundy’s womb.

A tiny boy took his first gasping breath and Perdain immediately pulled the bloody infant in his arms feeding him power to keep him alive. His tears falling on the infant’s face as he whispered and rocked and sobbed. “I promise I’ll always take care of you little one, I vow it on my soul I do. Oh Gods I swear I will.” Perdain cried and Tarnack knelt and gathered them both in his arms.

“Aye. I won’t let my best friend’s son be raised by any one but us. You will know how much your father and mother loved you.” Tarnack said, his throat closed with sorrow. Such a fragile newborn, prematurely brought into the world and fighting for his life, the little wielder feeding heavily off Perdain as a surrogate mother, his own mother’s bond severed far too soon, after seven miscarriages and trying so desperately to conceive him, her horrible plagued pregnancy carrying him, he was in desperate need.

“Give him to me just a moment Perdain, let me cut the cord properly and get the fluid out of his lungs. Tarnack go warm milk on the stove and send Rembrooke into the village, he’ll need a bottle and nipple to eat.” Kassa said and Tarnack went to send Rembrooke on his urgent errand and Tarnack carried Pavel inside and laid both Pavel and Mundy together side by side and draped them with a blanket.

He wept again over them and promised them both he’d always take care of their son and love him as a father should in Pavel’s stead. He vowed on his very soul to honor them both by raising their only child as his own and he promised the child would want for nothing. He had to tear himself away to fix the milk and

Perdain was holding the baby again, wrapped in a towel against his bloodstained tunic from where he had held the newborn before he could be cleaned.

Perdain's eyes filled with pain, sorrow, concern and grief as he rocked the newborn in the chair they had just brought to Mundy that morning as a pre-baby gift.

A senseless waste of life, and accident on the stair had taken two of their best friends away. Just twenty stairs, just twenty steps and life was gone. Looking at the staircase, the rug at the top looked to have slipped and had probably been the cause of Mundy's fall, sending her backwards down the stairs to hit her head and break her neck at the bottom. It had been so quick and so instant, they were comforted knowing neither Pavel nor Mundy had suffered the death of severed bonds and had Perdain not been there, the infant would have also died.

Had another wellspring not been there immediately to offer the child life power in Mundy's place, the baby would have followed mother into death in a matter of minutes or less.

Even now he struggled, grasping to bond to a wellspring that was not his mother and Perdain urged him to link and coaxed him to cement a bond with Perdain by cooing softly as he rocked him. "Just drink from my well little one, all I have is yours dearest. You need my light precious and I will ever give it to you." Perdain leaned over and kissed a tiny brow, running fingers through his thick thatch of black hair, just like Mundy's. It was hard to tell if he'd look like Pavel or Mundy, he was still so small, but the hair was definitely his mother's influence on him. Her raven black hair had always been thick and lush and her son already had a full head of her hair.

Kassa was tending Pavel and Mundy, giving them last rights as Rembrooke returned and took over for Kassa while Kassa went to help Tarnack fill the bottles with the milk he had been heating slowly on the stove as not to scald it.

It was just perfectly warm as Kassa showed Tarnack how to boil the nipples and bottles to sterilize them and then Tarnack filled one and carried it over to Perdain.

Perdain, settled the baby in the crook of his arm and rocked him slowly as he gently pressed the bottle passed the baby's lips. Kassa leaning over to monitor sighed with relief as the baby began to drink.

"Thank the Gods. Most babes fight against bottles and little ones like him don't know how to drink. This is a worry off my mind. If he can eat, he should be alright. He's small, but he's breathing alright. He's very weak though, Perdain he must be monitored constantly these next few weeks are crucial.

“Aye Father. I know. He will need me constantly, he’s a wielder and he must have power from my well if he is to survive at all. Wielders cannot create their own power like Wellsprings and Non-gifted folk can. I have to supply him all he needs until he learns how to gain power from the land itself. Wielder babes are very needy this little, I will have to take an immediate leave of absence from the council just to care for him. He will need me around the clock for months yet.” Perdain said never lifting his eyes from the baby and then smiling as the baby gurgled and dribbled a little milk down his chin and Perdain’s delicate finger’s wiped it away.

“Your dinner is not going anywhere my son, there is no need to hurry dearest.” Perdain said softly and now Tarnack found a moment to smile. Their son, this was now their son. His heir. Tarnack rested his chin on the arm of the rocker and reached over to run his fingers through the baby’s hair.

“Mundy’s hair.” He said and Perdain nodded.

“Aye and her fair skin. Hard to tell yet if he’ll look like her too. He’s still a bit wee to tell yet.” Perdain smiled and then sighed. “We should name him Tarnack.”

“I don’t think even they thought of a name yet.” Tarnack said choking back his emotions again. Remembering how Pavel just that morning had said to them all that they were having trouble combining his and Mundy’s names in a way that didn’t sound atrocious. Pundy, Munvel, Pavdy, all of them they hated so they were considering breaking with tradition and making up something.

“I want to honor them in his name and maybe perhaps combining both sets of his parents in his name? His real and adoptive.” Tarnack said and Perdain nodded, also remembering the conversation from that morning.

“Tarvel.” Kassa said smiling at them. “Both his wielder fathers for the little wielder and a good strong name for our new future King.” He said and both Perdain and Tarnack smiled.

“Aye, I like that. Tar?”

“Aye, Dain. I do. Tarvel he is.” Tarnack said with a thankful nod to Kassa who just smiled sadly as he and Rembrooke finished the necessary details that would send two beloved friends to their final rest.

It was a sad night to watch Pavel and Mundy’s joint funeral pyre burn. All the King’s Own and other Wielders and Wellsprings present in the city, riding the short distance from the city to attend the funeral.

All of them shocked to see Perdain cradling the infant in his arms all night and even as he rode Sundance, her reigns laying slack as Perdain slung the baby on his chest and rode his gentle mare home. It seemed even she knew she carried a very precious burden and took extra pains to walk gently back to the city.

The baby slept content all the way home in his new father's arms.

Tarnack walked back from council in a surly mood, until he opened the door to his suite he shared with Tarnack and their son and he couldn't help but smile at the sight that met him.

Perdain was on the floor with Tarvel, blowing nasty sounding 'raspberries' into the six-month-old baby's tummy, getting him to squeal with laughter. He'd obviously just had a bath and had been changed and before clothes were put back on the baby, 'Papa' was having a little fun with him.

There were no nannies or baby-minders. Perdain did it all himself. Changing, dressing, feeding, playing. All of it. He was adamant about it, stating that Tarvel had special needs that only Perdain could provide him. After that shaky first day and night with Tarvel learning to bond to Perdain instead of Mundy, everything had settled and Tarvel was well bonded to his Papa and would wail at the top of his lungs for Perdain if Perdain took two minutes to go to the bathroom by himself.

His crib was even right next to Perdain's side of the bed so he could feel Perdain's presence in his sleep. Otherwise Perdain was getting up seven or eight times a night to bring the baby into bed with he and Tarnack.

With the crib right next to them, Tarvel was happy and was now sleeping the night through much to both parent's relief.

Tarnack closed the door and flopped on the floor with Perdain and Tarvel who lit up brightly at his "Daddy" and Tarnack took over playing, picking up Tarvel and giving him a gentle toss in the air that the baby loved.

"I can have a right nasty day and all it takes is one laugh out of him and I'm good to go again." Tarnack said and Perdain just smiled.

"Aye. He's full of joy he is. Like Mundy always was, he not only looks like her, but acts like her too. Poor Pavel, he'd have been outnumbered." Perdain said and Tarnack nodded.

"Now we are." He chuckled and loving every minute of being a father. Tarvel and Perdain meant everything to Tarnack and this room at the end of the day had

become Tarnack's sanctuary. His family time was his time and the King was shoved in the closet and Tarnack came out full of joy and life again.

"Daddy! Look at me!" Tarvel said splashing around in their private garden fountain. Four years old and so full of energy Tarnack got tired just watching his son's antics.

"I see you. Be careful not to slip and fall, no running in the water!" Tarnack said watching his very naked child play in the hot summer air. Sharing a birthday with his Daddy they were in the garden having cake and iced cream and Perdain was sitting in the shade next to Tarnack in a sea of toys they'd bought for Tarvel for his birthday. One of them being a toy boat which he was currently playing with in the fountain. His princely garments with grass stained knees scattered from the shade tree to the fountain as he'd stripped on the fly.

"Happy Birthday Love." Perdain said leaning over to kiss his husband.

"A very good day indeed dearest. I love the painting of Tarvel, how did you get him to sit still long enough?" Tarnack asked and Perdain laughed.

"All things can be bribed with candy beloved. Not to mention when I told him it was for 'daddy' he always behaves like a little angel. Papa gets the whines and tantrums and Daddy gets a little saint."

"Daddy has the big old bad evil belt. That's why. I was the same with my father, all little boys are. Has he been trying to use his powers lately?" Tarnack asked and Perdain shook his head.

"No, just that one little attempt with the ball I took away from him after I told him not to throw it inside and even that he did unconsciously. He's not figured out yet he can do things others can't. He had no idea he made the ball roll off the shelf by his will alone. He thinks it was a lucky accident. I'm watching him though like a hawk. He's smart, it won't be long now he starts putting two and two together. Then we'll really need daddy's belt."

"Oh aye. He'll learn though, we all do eventually."

"Yes you do Mr. Apple Tree."

"I'm going to kill my mother for telling you about the apples."

"No you won't." Perdain chuckled nestling up against his husband as they watched their son play.

In moments like this, when they had private time alone as a family, when they weren't King and Prince Consort and the Prince Royal, they were just a simple family. Enjoying the love they shared, relaxing in the comfort it gave them and the future it promised.

Tarvel was a good boy, he was so much like Pavel and Mundy in mannerisms and gestures it was sometimes frightening, but also heartwarming. They saw their beloved friends every time they looked at their son. They saw their souls reflected in Tarvel's smile. They could hear Mundy's laugh and see Pavel's crooked grin. They also saw the honor and loyalty both his true parents had possessed.

He was honest and he never lied when Perdain asked him if he had been doing something he shouldn't have been. He rarely pouted or sulked, he'd only thrown tantrums as an infant, but they all did. His 'terrible twos' had just been more natural curiosity and he was a curious as a cat. Therefore, Perdain fed his mind with stories and Tarvel could already read simple children's books thanks to Perdain's teaching and coaching.

Tarnack's desk was covered in framed little pictures Tarvel had drawn for him, again with Perdain's education. Perdain was exceedingly hands on with their son. The only time Tarvel was left with a nanny was once a fortnight for Council sessions which Perdain had resumed attending when Tarvel was nine months old and could be left alone for a few hours with a nanny and not just any nanny. King's Own Wellspring Edna, who also just happened to be Tarnack's baby sister and Tarvel's "aunty Edna".

She had bonded to a handsome youth several years earlier, not long after the war where they had played together in the hidden temple in Garth. Being the eldest Children in attendance that winter and bored with playing 'kid's games' had often explored the temple together.

When Ednack and Tarna moved to the city to stay with Tarnack and Ednar, Edna had stayed too and had pretty much forgotten about Yorin for a few years until he turned up again at nineteen in the city, no longer a gangly boy and it had been a joyous reunion and bonding. Three years later he'd earned his King's Own ranking on his own merits when he'd been instrumental in bringing down a resurgence of the slave trade by spending months undercover within the ring itself. Such dangerous work had earned him his accolades and now he and Edna went out on King's Business only and when back in the city, Edna was always eager to baby sit her nephew.

When she wasn't acting the nanny with Yorin to guard the royal suites and play with his nephew too. It was Ednack and Tarna. They were officially retired King's Own and lived in the palace. Ednack was the Representative of the Wielder Brotherhood on the council and unlike his son, Politics really suit him and he

could argue with the best. When not in council, Tarvel was a regular in his grandparent's rooms, getting high on sugar and getting spoiled by Grandma and Grandpa.

This gave Perdain time to resume most of his duties as Prince Consort. When he couldn't have Tarvel with him, he stayed well guarded by family and Perdain worked the charities and school foundations, opened ceremonies at public functions and held his council seat during sessions.

All other times, he was just Papa and personally taking an active role in his son's life and loving every minute of it. Perdain benefited from Tarvel's love and joy and Tarvel benefited not only in education but knowing his parents truly loved him. Perdain was not going to be a father like his own, Tarvel would never feel the sting and Pain of a disinterested parent like Perdain had.

If anyone so much as breathed a word about Perdain's past in Tarvel's hearing he ushered the boy out of the room. Tarvel would not know how Perdain grew up until he was much older. The child was sensitive and would wonder why his Papa had lived in a temple and not the palace and then would wonder if Papa and Daddy would send him away too.

Perdain would hide the truth from the innocence of Tarvel's youth. He'd tell him in time so when he was King he would understand the depths of truth and feel keenly the effects so he'd make wiser judgments.

However, for now he was still only four years old and now was the time to just be a child and enjoy life.

The training of the King would come later as he grew and both Tarnack and Perdain knew that one day Tarvel would follow in their footsteps and they knew they'd be proud of him, they already were.

The palace was once again filled with love, it had been bereft of the emotion for far too many years, long before Fenderack, before Pendergar, for years that Monarchy had put politics before family, put greed before charity, and put personal feelings and biases before the vows sworn to the Gods.

No longer. The palace was now home to a new Monarchy, built first on vows of faith, vows of love, vows to the people and vows to the land. The nodes were pure and alive as if to herald that Peace had finally come to reign in Holst. Thanks to King Tarnack the Just, Prince Consort Perdain the Beautiful and Wise, and the Prince Royal Tarvel.

Only time would tell what the people would call him in the days to come.

END

Author's Note:

"The Prince in Peril and the Outlaw King", Goh mentions this ballad about Perdain and Tarnack first in "My Gentle Strength" when he and Obie are uncovering the origin of the Male Wellspring Laws. It is mentioned again in this tale, and here are the lyrics of the song that is still played today in Holst. (If it were, like, ya know, a real place and not just in my imagination. ~_^)

"The Prince in Peril and the Outlaw King"

*Here begins the tale of Prince Perdain the Kind
Born to be Heir one cold winter's night*

*Born first of the Twins to the King and Queen
All hailed the news until proclaimed WELLSPRING*

*Never has a Wellspring held the throne
No power to wield and all fey to the bone*

*Brother Twin Fenderack a wielder unconcealed
With soul black as pitch that he soon would reveal*

*The Queen was in worry the King in Denial
That Fenderack would harm Prince Perdain the mild*

*Rumors they say are oft based in fact
The King shows favor to son Fenderack*

*Perdain left bereft in scorn and alone
No trinkets, no treasures to call his own*

*Fenderack was spoiled beyond what is wise
He tortured Perdain who was left compromised*

*The Queen in fear over Young Perdain's life
Took him to the Temple to protect him at Night*

*Evil still lurked and stalked poor Perdain
His father ignored him and left him in Pain*

*His brother would use him and shatter his well
Perdain would lay suffering with no one to tell*

*Then one night when all seemed it could not grow worse
Proclaimed ANATHEMA and now Perdain cursed!*

*A life spent in poverty, no titles, no crown
His sanctuary turned prison his life upside down*

*Kings Own Tarnack, was in Pernath they say
His own hopes shattered on that ill fated day*

*Always true to his Wielder vows most grand
Honor First to the Gods, the people and land*

*“Blasphemy!” He cried at laws that shame
And fled Pernath to become Outlaw in name.*

*To fight for the people, to right what was wrong
He would stay true to his vows and learn to be strong*

*A Rebellion he formed to fight growing evil
And Perdain heard his tale and wrote a letter with zeal*

*He wrote to Brave Tarnack, with warnings and hope
He gave to the outlaw his knowledge and wisdom to cope*

*Fear Fenderack! Perdain pleaded and his secrets revealed
The true face of Evil and Pendergar’s Fate sealed!*

*Moved by the Words of the Imprisoned Prince
Tarnack vowed fealty and sent him a gift*

*A ring made of Silver, ancient as the Tides
A God’s Ring to Protect Perdain during hard times*

*For years in secret they wrote to one another
Never meeting in flesh, but falling in love with each other*

*Then all Perdain’s warnings came abrupt in the night
PERNATH IS ON FIRE! NOTHING IS RIGHT!*

*The King and Queen dead from drinking fouled wine
Fenderack on the throne proclaiming “the kingdom is mine!”*

*The Prince was in Peril, his life soon forfeit!
Tarnack saddled his Stardust and made journey swift!*

Through the chaos he rode, his heart fearing the worst

To his love he must fly, his heart about to burst.

*Into the city he dashed through the crowds
To the temple where Perdain was in hidden in shrouds.*

*“TO ME MY LOVE!” Tarnack called out
Perdain fled Pernath on the Back of Tarnack’s mount.*

*Away into the night they fled on the run
Their bonding that night was brighter than the sun*

*“Knew I loved you and our bonding would be!”
They both sang together with hearts set free.*

*East they still flew, the battle not won
To Garth they headed quick on the run*

*The call rang out to all who would hear
To Garth all come to battle this fear!*

*Together as Bonded Tarnack and Perdain
Gathered an army in the Face of Winter’s Bane*

*The people Cried “Tarnack, you are our King True”
Lead us to victory and give us your boon!*

*With Perdain the Wise and Tarnack the Just
They led the people and gathered all trust*

*When Spring came, the army went forth
To stop Fenderack’s Murderous Court*

*With the King leading charge, Pernath soon fell
Fenderack by Tarnack’s hands went down to hell*

*Perdain the fair and Tarnack the strong
Took the throne of Holst while the temple bells gonged*

*King Tarnack now rules Holst a Peasant turned King
Prince Perdain has found love and still wears Tarnack’s Ring.*