

Primus Inter Pares

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Introduction

Here is the beginning part of the story I have just written. It is about Aurelius and Augarin Haldane and the events of the first Haldane king. This chapter is based upon a thread in the newsgroup not too long ago. Please take into consideration several things as you read this:

- (1) Katherine may in the future may write on this very subject so I was vague and ambiguous on purpose
- (2) I also take for granted that the two Haldane mentioned in the story are Deryni (we may debate this issue in another thread if someone wants to take up the question)
- (3) I also was purposefully mysterious, hoping to bring the reader into an era where we have never been before in the Deryni world
- (4) Primus Inter Pares is Latin for "First Among Equals" - the three main characters which are mentioned are Aurelius Haldane, first Archbishop of Valoret; Augarin Haldane, father of Gwynedd and first Haldane king; and lastly one mentioned and introduced only briefly, one of threadmakers, Orin. For it is these three who are the first of many dynasties in the Deryni World.

Chapter 1 - A Vision of a Kingdom

***And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you,
I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision
and will speak to him in a dream.
-- Numbers 12:6***

The Vision of a Kingdom - May 20, 645

The day had been a success, yet as the archbishop opened the door to his new home in the small room near the chapel, more would be expected of him and his brother. The dynasty his brother Augarin needed to create would be difficult, yet Aurelius knew it must be done. The counts and nobles of the surrounding lands could threaten war with the recently created monarchy or even worse, the Bremagni prelate would descend on the country with a threat of Interdict. It had only been only a few weeks since he and his fellow priests had declared independence from Johannes III of Bremagne, the tyrannical patriarch of the Holy Church.

The countryside was embattled with counts and barons fighting over precious land and his brother had felt the bitter ends of those encounters. Augarin had defeated Jamish Count of Lendour nearly two years ago and defeated Rubik Count of Carthane only a month previous. But it was costly to continue warring against neighboring fiefdoms. The fighting would continue unless something could be done to keep the fighting to a minimum. Augarin, in an assembly of great lords and clergy, proclaimed himself as High King of the Haldane hoping to bring the battles to an end.

That was ten days ago, but today was the banner day of Augarin Haldane. Aurelius had the privilege of crowning his brother as the High King. The coronation had been splendid, but whether or not the reign of Augarin Haldane would be splendid would yet to be seen. The need for divine guidance was evident. Aurelius, after a step into his quarters, felt the need to pray. Near the chest at the foot of his bed, Aurelius knelt before it and clasped his hands together looking to the heavens.

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.” Aurelius dropped his head in reverence as he continued his prayer in silence. More focused on the on the words of the prayer than his physical comforts, he slipped into a trance.

In his semi-consciousness state, Aurelius felt his psychic being depart his physical body. Although physically he remained kneeling before the chest, psychically he hovered above his body able to move about the entire room. Suddenly a psychic light flashed below him as he peered around. In an effort to keep the light from blinding him, he tried to shade the light from piercing his eyes only to realize the light did not affect his sight.

As the light dissipated, he could see an ethereal outline of a man sitting on the edge of his bed. The man wore a simple woolen gray-spun robe. The face of the man was warm and inviting despite the ghostly image.

“Who are you?” he heard himself ask.

“A friend of the Haldanes,” came the whispered response.

Aurelius floated downward hoping to get a better look at the man. The man appeared to have silver-blond hair, but he couldn’t tell because of the etherealness of the moment. The man seemed familiar to

him but he could not place the recollection. Unsure of the man's realness, Aurelius wondered if the man was truly in his quarters or just in his semi-state of consciousness. "I am a Haldane."

"I know."

"What do you want with us?"

"I came today only to tell you of the importance of this blessed event."

For just a moment, Aurelius felt alarm at the thought of a stranger suddenly in his quarters or was it only in his mind? His thoughts must have betrayed him for the stranger raised his hands in abeyance.

"Do not worry. I am here as a friend of the King. Your actions have been seen, and we commend you on your choice."

"Choice? What choice?" Aurelius questioned. "There is only one of you, but you said 'we.' Who are you?"

"Who I am does not matter. You, however, my young Haldane archbishop, will be great within the church and your brother will father a country."

The image of the man shimmered, and then began to fade away. "Wait, stay and tell me who you are!"

The man stood as to indicate he was leaving. A smile of approval came across the face of the ghostly image as he faded into nothingness.

A thought suddenly swept through Aurelius' mind. "Are you Deryni?"

The man had all but disappeared, when a strong voice answered his question. "Yes."

Chapter 2 - A Secret Among Friends

*I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth
-- Isaiah 45:19*

Aurelius roused himself from the deep sleep that had overtaken him as he had prayed. Had he dreamt of the man sitting on the edge of the bed or was his mind playing tricks on him after a long day of priestly functions? He pushed up from his kneeling position to find his legs had gone to sleep. He moved into a sitting position on the chest to stretch his legs to get the blood flowing. How long had he been out?

After a few moments, feeling returned to his legs. Gingerly, he stood to remove the priestly garments he had worn to perform the coronation. Aurelius opened the chest, and then removed the stole from around his neck. A dear friend specifically made the chest for his priestly garments when he had been elected archbishop. A wry smile tugged at his tired face as he thought of the man.

Carefully he folded the stole into fourths and placed it in the chest. The layers of the priest's clothing could be overwhelming at times and he was glad to be getting out of them. The chasuble came next, a sleeveless outer vestment worn by the officiating priest at mass. He exhaled as he felt the weight of the garment removed from his shoulders.

As he did, he felt a prickling sensation at the base of his neck. Massaging his neck with his left hand, he figured it was from the time spent praying in the same position. The sensation seemed to subside as he massaged it a little longer, then he ignored it to continue disrobing.

Yet before he could untie the cincture around his waist, the prickling feeling at the base of his neck swept over his entire body. Suddenly alert, Aurelius felt the presence of someone else in the room. He turned to see the door was closed, but he had the uncanny feeling someone was about to enter the room. He looked about for a weapon, but finding nothing of substance to ward off the intruder or the feeling, he prepared for the worst with empty hands.

For a long time he stood there, ready for anything. But nothing happened. The sensation remained, but no one entered the room. After scrutinizing his chambers one more time, he stepped to the door. He slowly slid the bar to unlock the door expecting at any moment for something to happen. After what seemed like an eternity of waiting, with the door unbarred, he opened the door to a semi-darkened chapel. The candles on the altar cast an eerie glow about the chapel. Shadowed corners made it difficult to see clearly throughout the nave.

Shaking his head, he knew something was amiss. Taking one of candles from the altar, he searched the chapel for the intruder. Aurelius thrust the lone candle into every darkened corner in hopes of finding the cause of the strange sensation. Nothing. Quietly he returned the candle to its place on the altar and continued to his room.

Stopping at the threshold of his open door, he glanced back into the chapel one last time. First it had been the dream, now this. "I must really need some rest," he said out loud as he stepped into his quarters.

"You probably do," a voice said startling him. He jerked his head toward where he thought he had heard the unseen voice. It was a man, that much he knew.

"Who's there?" he questioned looking back into the chapel. He could see no one.

"I'm here," the voice whispered nearly in his ear.

Aurelius' eyes widened at the closeness of the man's voice. Quickly turning to look in his quarters, he saw a man looking into his chest of priestly garments. "Step away from the chest, those aren't your things!"

"I have enough of my own garments to want even more. Does wearing all these 'priestly garments' make it hot?" the man asked finally looking up to face Aurelius.

Aurelius nearly choked when he saw the face of the man. "Were you here earlier?"

"What? No salutation or greeting for your old friend?"

Aurelius ignored the comment. Instead, he resumed untying his cincture. "Would you mind helping with this?" He shrugged his shoulders downward as he let his alb fall behind him. The man stepped behind Aurelius to hold the alb as he stepped out of it. "Thank you." He slightly felt the prickling sensation again as their hands momentarily touched before Aurelius took the alb from the man. "I see you have taken time from your Temple to join us today," he commented coolly.

"You know it takes a good portion of my time."

Aurelius studied the man he called his friend. The dark hair was starting to gray around the temples, though his friend was slightly older than he. But the dark eyes had always held him enthralled. "We, that is my brother and I, are glad you are here," he said finally.

"Where is your good brother, the High King?" the man said taking a seat on the bed. He watched as Aurelius folded the alb.

"He is probably feasting," Aurelius replied placing the alb into the chest before he closed it. He took a simple monastic brown robe from another chest and pulled it over his head. "You did not answer my question."

The man hooded his eyes. "No, I just arrived."

Aurelius' eyes widened at the man's reply. "You did not come to me while I was praying?" he posed with concern.

Arching an eyebrow, the man responded, "No, why not tell me what happened."

"This is no time for your stalk and hunt games."

"I honestly do not know what you are speaking of," he responded quietly.

"Orin, I know you support the king and I in establishing an independent church free of the Bremagni patriarch's clutches, but this is no time to be coy," Aurelius said forcefully.

"I am not being coy, I am being honest." Orin stated. "Now tell me what happened while you were praying and maybe we can get to the bottom of this."

Chapter 3 - The Feast of the High King

*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.
-- Isaiah 55:2*

"Long live the Haldane!"

The hall erupted once again with one voice, "Long live the Haldane!"

Augarin Haldane sat in the chief seat looking over the crowded hall of his manor as his friends bellowed the declaration. His gray eyes sparkled with pride as he looked from table to table seeing the men that had fought bravely by his side.

"Friends!" Augarin roared waiting for the men to become quiet. "Friends, we have fought the good fight, and we have emerged victorious!"

The men cheered at the king's words.

"But all is not done," Augarin continued. The voices again became silent. "Our lives have been fraught with war and death. Many of our beloved friends are not with us today because their lives were taken from us. They made the choice to fight, as did you, to bring peace to our lands.

"We survived the battles and lived to fight another day. Yet the time has come for wars to cease among us. We must live in peace! We must live on! Our sons and daughters urge us on toward the greater life of peace. They, too, want their lives to be carefree and their fields to bring great harvest.

"Peace has not been given to us, we fought for it!" Augarin said fiercely as he pounded both fists into the table. "And we will have to fight to keep it. Many will come to reign over us, but we will not let them! Even more will come to kill us, but we will stay their attacks! Some will even try to subtly come into our midst and we must be ready! I pledge before you this night to bring peace to our lives."

At that moment, the men listening to the High King's words automatically went to one knee in unison. Chairs tumbled to the floor as men bowed their head in response to the king's pledge. Then without cue, the man sitting nearest the Haldane rose only enough to shift his view toward the king.

"I, Richard Drummond, do pledge my fealty to the kingdom of Augarin Haldane and become your liege man of life and limb and earthly worship; and faith and truth will I bear unto you, to live and to die, against all manner of folk, so help me God." Augarin, taken aback at the words of one his most trusted advisers and friends, said nothing. The rest of the men at the table followed suit in swearing fealty to him. Then the men at the next table did the same, and the next until all present had come forward to the High King's table and bent their knee in fealty to the new monarch. Augarin sat in awe at the response of the men. He had fought with them side by side, but little did he realize that each and every one of them would swear allegiance to him.

"Listen to me, men of valor," Augarin said as he stood, his eyes brimming with tears. He picked up the mug before him and raised it high. "Yesterday, you fought with me valiantly; today, you feast with me in the spoils of victory; tomorrow, may all God's blessings rain down upon you because you are here with me this day!"

"Hear, hear," several men said. Many more began pounding their fist on the wooden tables in approval.

"Eat, eat this good food before you," he proclaimed as servants brought in venison and roasted vegetables. "May our souls be enriched by the blessings of friends as our bodies are strengthened by this fare."

"In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen"

Augarin turned to see his brother step inside the room to pronounce his blessing. He quietly made his way to the head table. He had a look of concern in his eyes, though he was smiling.

"Is something wrong?" Augarin asked quietly as his brother leaned over to speak to him.

"We have had a visitor."

"Oh, bring him in," Augarin said looking to the door.

"No, brother, **had** a visitor," Aurelius whispered in his ear.

Augarin screwed his face in response to his brother's remark. "You still haven't answered my question."

"No nothing is wrong, but we need to speak."

"Can it wait?" Augarin asked looking from his brother to the fare before him.

Aurelius snickered at Augarin's concentration. "Yes, it can wait."

"Good. Steward," Augarin said to the man waiting his table. "Set a place here at my table for the good archbishop."

Chapter 4 - A Kingdom Is Born

***But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,
an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show
forth the praises of him who hath called you of darkness
and into his marvelous light.***

-- 1 Peter 2:9

"Brother," Aurelius tried to gain Augarin's attention. "Brother, it is time we left this hall to speak of other affairs."

"Ah, Aurel," Augarin said holding his goblet higher signaling for the steward to refill it. "Why not let me enjoy one night of feasting?"

"You have had too much drink brother," Aurelius said pushing away from the table. "It's time we leave this hall. You have had your fill." Aurelius motioned to the steward to bring help in escorting the king away from the table. Others tried to interfere, but were too drunk to cause any problems.

Aurelius followed as the men bore the weight of the king between them to the corridor beyond.

"I can walk," Augarin said. "I am not as drunk as I appear." He gave the men holding him a hard stare.

The two men stepped away from the king. Augarin swayed for an instant before he caught his footing. Supporting himself on his brother's shoulder, He walked toward his room. "See, I can walk."

"It is not your walk I am concerned about, Sire," Aurelius said in a quiet tone. He moved closer to his brother's side to help shoulder him as he stumbled about. "Maybe I should be," he said with a small laugh.

"What is so important that you had to remove me from my feast?" Augarin questioned suddenly serious.

"Open the doors," Aurelius commanded the guards as they approached the king's room.

The two guards immediately opened the doors to allow the king and his brother to walk side by side into the room. Aurelius let the king fall to the bed in his half drunken state. He watched, as Augarin lay spread-eagled on the bed as if he was ready for a long night's sleep. He just shook his head as he let Augarin enjoy his moment. But in that small moment, he moved to the water basin, picked it up, and returned to the side of the bed.

"Forgive me," he whispered closing his eyes looking toward the ceiling for just an instant. A smile slowly emerged from the archbishop's lips and he did it. He drenched the king across the face with the full contents of the water basin.

The king sputtered and waved his hands about trying to overcome the soaking. "Aurel, I cannot believe you did that!" he spat.

"We need to talk."

"It could have waited until morning," Augarin responded wiping the water from his face, and then slinging towards his brother.

"No, now is the time we talk," Aurelius said in an authoritative voice.

"Then, what is it?" Augarin asked giving in to his brother's familiar tone of authority.

"Our time has come. We have fought side by side to bring us to this place. You have supported me in attaining this high and exalted position and it is time to do more."

"More?" Augarin questioned flabbergasted. He had taken off his tunic and thrown it to the floor while his brother spoke.

"What more can we do? You have reached the highest position allowed by law. You are the Archbishop of Valoret despite Johannes decree. What more is there?"

Aurelius frowned at the king's words. "Yes, we have set ourselves free from Johannes tyrannical reign, but consider that only a spiritual reign. You have to lead us in a political arena, you must lead us from these petty battles of counts and nobles to something greater!" he exclaimed.

"I am the High King of Haldane!" Augarin retorted.

"Yes, you are, but you need to be more than just the High King of Haldane. This world has needs for you to be a king that it will never forget. A king of great import for noble and peasant alike, for Deryni and those not Deryni, and for the Church, for the army you will command, and others that I have yet to think of." He paused to let his words sink into his brother's mind. "Broaden your horizons, Augarin, look beyond what you have now, look to the future. Think on these while you build this kingdom. Be more than you have ever dreamed."

Augarin sat on the edge of the bed dumbfounded by his brother's words. He looked to the floor watching the puddles of water grow larger from his tunic and his wet hair. "What else is there brother?"

Aurelius chose his words carefully. "I had a visitor tonight. Of that, I shan't tell you more, but his exact words were 'your brother will father a country.' And for no other reason than that should you become a king this land has never had. You, my dear brother are king and while feasting is important, it fosters camaraderie and loyalty among the men, but leadership is what men need to take them from the hole they live in to the courts of kings. You have chosen the mantle of leadership; wear it with pride, dignity, and honor. But most of all, wear it!"

Augarin looked up at his brother's final words. "That I shall do, Aurel. This I do, I shall not do for myself or even for you and the church, I do it to set men free from the tyrannical rule of the world. This land we call home, shall be home for all men, noble-born or peasant. This mantle you speak of, I shall wear. But you too, have your cross to bear. The church has set before your destiny, live your life to serve God, and I shall live mine to serve the people."