

I trust you readers are enjoying this. If you wish to make comments please feel free to do so. If you have come into the story at this point I suggest you start back at the beginning or at least skim it over. I have also been slack in putting the disclaimer at the beginning of each chapter. It can be found at the beginning. Just a reminder, the character list was posted along with the first chapter (separate file). I was reading, just today a history of science article looking at how Alchemy morphed into modern chemistry. (http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/03/15/good_as_gold/?page=full). That got me thinking about what took these guys so long. The answer, in my kindest words, is largely ignorance. In subsequent chapters you will find references to scientific and social/philosophical topics that may seem at first to be your author's modern mind and education talking. Not so dear reader, not so. Most of this has been referenced in the text and you can check for yourself or email me. Remember just because the French and Italians of the day were ignorant does not mean others were. All that aside, please enjoy and join Arden and his friends on their journey of discovery.

8 Return to Koalhurst
by dnrock (dnrock@rock.com)

1312 the 9th month 26th day:

Today we did not need to work as we did for the past several. Iason and I managed to complete Abrith's vineyards along with the help of my sisters. Abrith and Abernath finished in the olive grove. They will be able to harvest the lentils, beans and peas between them. Iason was quite taken with my youngest sister Zosimos, as she is very friendly and much like his own sister. Mother was most taken with Iason, much as the Princess seems taken with me. Damao, Heron, Pyrros and Volos all worked along side of us and Abernath, things went much quicker and they managed to assist several of the neighbors. I liked that, as all of us boys could then take advantage and spend a pleasant afternoon at the swimming place.

We had traveled here with Thanatos and several of his men. Our four were not happy about this, feeling they were qualified to do their service but I guess Father had other ideas. He did not say. After this stay I am sure Perum will have more than enough coin to wed my sister and set up a household & business for himself.

My family took in Iason as another son and brother. I was happy about this. We were overwhelmed with questions and spent many hours explaining life in the city and castle. Father had insisted I bring presents for my family which I did. I got a fine new flute for Abernath, a fine long dress for my mother, selected for me by Darkon's mother, rich cloth for my sisters and several books made on Archimedes' new printing press for Abrith. On our way from the castle we passed a number of pack trains all laden with coal from the near by mines. I took it this was destined for the forges at the castle.

Iason and I shared Abernath's bed at night. We also shared his body. I never dreamed my older brother was such an accomplished lover. He was shy about it and claimed just natural talent not experience. Iason and I did not care. His cock was stiff and long and his ardor mighty. He filled us both and gave us pleasure equal to that which he received. I must say it only took him a short time to accept Iason as brother not Crown Prince, about ten minutes in bed. I'm glad of that. He would always treat me as brother not Prince, I think it is good

he treats my betrothed the same.

The neighbors and all of Koalhurst's people were more than surprised to see two princes working in vineyards and orchards. I know the older girls were more than impressed when our four guardians removed their tunics displaying their well developed muscular bodies. I know mother and Abrith were most impressed by them. Not for their physical beauty, which is great but for their devotion to us and willing service to them and our neighbors. I was also impressed by the show of support and appreciation of all Koalhurst toward Iason and I. They showed great pride in my having been chosen as the Crown Prince's Consort. I am sure we honored them by visiting. I also think we enriched the community by bringing much coin into the local economy.

A goodly number of the boys from Koalhurst expressed a strong desire to join us at the castle, when old enough. It would appear from the way everyone was acting at the swimming place that our guardians had already begun to requite several of them.

At first it was a bit awkward. They knew me already, as Arden not Prince Arden. They were in awe of the Crown Prince. I looked over at Iason and he smiled, we pulled off our tunics. "There is no prince here now, just two hot and dirty boys that need a swim and playmates," Iason announced. That was all it took for everyone to get naked and into the water, frolicking for the remainder of the afternoon. On the return trip we were all riding two and three to a horse; one of my old playmates sighed and said it was now quite late and his father would be angry that he had stayed away so long.

I told him that we now have two princes and five guardians. His father would understand. He was not convinced. I suggested that when we stop at his home, he should kneel before us and kiss our hands and I would tell his father that his tardiness was at our instance. Iason leaned over from his horse saying, this is a game that Arden is learning to play very well. All of us were giggling like girls until we put on our little show. His father was less than impressed, however. While it was clear he would not discipline him in front of us, it was also clear he would make my friend's life less than pleasant once we departed. I think the presence of our 5 guardians had some strong influence on this. I could see the look of abject fear in Kleitos' eyes, so could Iason. I had no choice but to act firmly and swiftly. I sure, was not sure, just how far my princely authority extended but Father and Uncle would understand, I was confident, and stand behind my action. I may get several long lectures, I can live with them. This was my thinking at the time.

"Kleitos, it would appear that our apology has only been accepted out of custom, not in the spirit it was presented. What price for Kleitos' service to the Crown Prince and his Consort?"

I knew that he had referred to Kleitos, in the past, as worthless but he dare not say so now. "Ten gold coins," was his reply. I reached into my purse and pull out five. "I think five is a more appropriate number." Holding out my hand. Five is all I had and I did not know how many Iason had. I had not even asked him if he would support this. Phokas thought for a moment and realized I had probably not forgotten his attitude or comments about Kleitos. He took the money. The look on Kleitos' face was a mix of joy and bewilderment. He immediately knelt down again and began kissing my hand. I had to stop him.

"Kleitos, you should visit Abrith and get official papers from him. It has been a pleasure to do business with you sir." I nodded to Phokas and bid Kleitos rise. "Go and get whatever

belongings you have, kiss your mother good by, we will hold here until you return.” The other boys were all shocked but I know they wanted to cheer. Iason took up the thread next. He said, “If any of you desire to enter our service and can get permission from your fathers, tell Abrith and he will make full arrangements.” They all mobbed us swearing to do so.

We all walked to the inn where our horses are stabled. Kleitos wanted to care for Zephyros but I would not let him. I did let him help. “Kleitos you are in our service you are not our servant. Iason and I must care for our horses, just as our guardians must care for their own horses. You can help us if you choose but it is not a requirement.” I pulled off my tunic and Iason pulled his off too. A signal the game was over and the princes were no more. He embraced me holding me tight. I could see tears in his eyes. I knew those tears and those feelings. Iason and the guardians crowded around us. All giving Kleitos assurances he would not regret coming into our service.

When we arrived at Abrith’s he was surprised but said nothing when I told him what I had done and asked him to do up the contract for Kleitos’ father. He told me five coins was not sufficient. Iason give him five more. He smiled and praised us. He turned to Kleitos and informed him that he would give these five coins to his mother. “It will help to ease her pain.” The smile on Kleitos’ face was so wide and so radiant I am sure the sun became briefly jealous. I told him of our offer to the others and he just smiled. “I will see that is done and I am sure the numbers will be greater then you think.”

I asked him if he thought I had acted correctly in this matter. Abrith smiled. “Son, you did what you believed was the correct and proper thing. It is what I would have done in the same situation, if I had the same means. I do not know Prince Karyakos or King Iason well enough to say they would completely agree, they will be proud that you did what you thought was correct and honorable. You have cemented the life long loyalty of Kleitos and earned a new respect for the Crown from him and the entire community. For that alone your new father and uncle will be pleased.

While this was all transpiring, I later learned, a message rider had arrived at the inn. We were being summoned back to the Castle. Kleitos would accompany us of course. Zephyros would just have to carry two. Thanatos took Kleitos to the inn with him for the night. The Castle is a long day’s ride from Koalhurst. By the pace Thanatos was setting I figured it would be a short day. Since Iason and I had spent all of our coins, Abrith was kind enough to advance us a few silvers each.

Just before our mid day meal, which would be near a small village over half the distance to the castle, we encountered a medium sized lad of about 15, hobbling along the road. He had obviously sustained some kind of injury as his leg was covered with blood and he used a crooked stick to assist his walking. Pyrros galloped ahead to render assistance. I could see the others were much more cautious fearing some kind of trap perhaps. Pyrros had dismounted and was examining the lad’s leg when we came along side.

Volos, Heron and Damao deployed themselves on either side of us. Heron took the pack horse’s lead from Thanatos who also dismounted. Pyrros took up his position and Iason, Kleitos and I stayed on our mounts. I could not hear all that was said but it appeared the boy had been in some kind of accident and his leg was broken. He was in great pain. Thanatos had us dismount and Kleitos held the reins of all our horses. Iason and I went to assist him. The boy’s name was Alexandros and he seemed quite embarrassed at his

situation. I could not understand why.

Iason got some water and a cloth to clean the blood from his leg while I secured some leather thongs and some strips of cloth from Thanatos' saddle bags. Volos was sent into the near by thicket to secure some stiff branches. I did not know what this was for but soon learned. Thanatos told Alexandros that his leg was broken and that the bone must be properly set. To do that he would need move it into the position it should have and bind it above and below the break to the poles Volos was fetching. Once secured in the splint it would have a chance to mend but that mending would take some time. The setting would be painful and Iason and I were told to hold Alexandros firmly on the ground. He gave him a small piece of leather to bite on during the most painful parts.

Iason was most impressed with Alexandros' courage and fortitude. It was painful but he did not cry or even cry out. He did bite very hard on the leather between his teeth.

When that was done and the pain had lessened Pyrrhos brought some wine and Damao some cheese and flat bread for Alexandros. Kleitos now had all of the horses under his control. I noticed he did very well at this and seemed to have a natural way with the animals. We all took our midday meal.

Once refreshed, Alexandros realized who it was that had stopped to render him assistance. He at once inquired why we had done this for a poor orphan as himself. Iason just replied, he obviously need help and we seemed to be the only source of that help in the vicinity. He told us he had been climbing a large fig tree and fallen out of it. Now he realized why the figs were still on those top most branches. Damao offered more food which he accepted but only after we assured him we had plenty and it was surplus to our needs. Jason looked at me with that same look I had looked at him with the day before.

"Alexandros, do you have anyone near here to care for you?"

"Yes and no." He had a place to sleep with the animals, at a near by farm. He worked there for his food and clothing. I was not impressed, since he was very thin and not at all well dressed, even for a farm worker. Thanatos reminded him that for the next several weeks he would not be able to work and that he could not stand on his leg until it had healed. He did not know how to respond, I could see by his face and mannerism, he was disheartened.

"Then it is settled," Iason said, "You will come to the castle with us where you can recover."

"How can that happen if I can not walk?"

"You will ride with me on my horse."

"I can not ride with this on my leg." Iason looked at Thanatos for help.

"It can be done. It may not be comfortable but it can be done." He had Volos and Heron move most of the packs from one of the horses to the others. The four guardians, two on each side, lifted him in the air and up over the animals hind quarters setting him on the pack frame. They tied his legs to the frame. The other older guardians stayed on duty positioned on either side of us during all the activity.

As we rode into the little village he told us where the King's representative lived. That is

Abrith's job in Koalhurst. Thanatos called the man out and asked if he knew "this boy". The representative said he did. Thanatos asked him why an orphan was living in such conditions in his village. The man did not answer.

"Alexandros, as an orphan with no living relatives, is automatically a ward of the King, my father will be less than pleased to learn his ward has been so badly treated, that he suffered injury just to get enough food to prevent starvation."

"And I suppose you are the Crown Prince?"

Yes, this is Crown Prince Jason and I am Prince Arden, Crown Prince Consort and this is, Alexandros one of King Jason the 7th's children, therefore our brother. I trust this is the first and only time you have failed in your office.

"We must not tarry here long," Thanatos interjected, "you have been informed that Alexandros is accompanying us to the castle." He did not hesitate but nodded to us and we rode off in a great hurry. Once out of sight he slowed and Kleitos moved from my horse to assist Alexandros on the one he was tied to. As we approached the castle it was almost dark.

Once inside the castle gates several soldiers assisted us in taking Alexandros up to our bedchamber where Ikaros bathed him, Dysme came to assist in preparing a sleeping place for him and Kleitos.

After our evening meal Father and Uncle Jason returned to our bedchamber with us to meet the two new boys and learn how they came to be with us. I know that Thanatos gave his report. They knew the facts and I am sure had already ordered a review of at least one representative's work.

Kleitos and Alexandros were both most taken by the King and Consort coming to meet them on the very night of their arrival. They were both totally overwhelmed by how informal and loving a meeting this was. Alexandros was welcomed as a ward. What was most surprising to him was that he was thanked repeatedly for having allowed the young princes to assist him.

Kleitos was also thanked for having accepted my offer of employment. They were both encouraged to tell their stories. Father and Uncle listened attentively asking a few questions and chuckled at the humorous parts. It was decided that Kleitos would join the Palace Boys the next day. Alexandros would remain with us until his leg has healed. The tutors would call on him each day so his lessons could begin as soon as possible. Ikaros was instructed to make sure the physician called on him, soon and as often as needed.

I had hoped my mentor would speak to me about what we did and how it was done. Perhaps he will soon. It was obvious to me that Alexandros was in great discomfort but he never once complained or showed any outward signs of it.

Jason and I accompanied our fathers to their bed chamber. Nothing was said about our adventures or about why we had been summoned. Our mentors took us to their bodies, showering us with kisses and tender touches. We both had a ride on our mentors' shaft. It is much like posting in the saddle except this saddle is much softer, warmer and has a stiff arrow that fills our anuses and gives us immeasurable pleasure. As we lay in the dark

enjoying the effects of that immeasurable pleasure, Uncle Jason whispered many things to me. Mostly how much he love me and proud he was of my progress. He told me Iason and I were becoming men faster than he ever imagined possible. He suggested that in future it would be wise to seek permission before bring new people into our household. I began to beg forgiveness but he would have none of it, kissing me until I stopped. "Arden, your authority is as great as, but no greater then, your responsibility. Kleitos is the fifth person on your personal staff. Their primary allegiance is to you and Iason as men, not your office. You two must now take on full responsibility for him just like your guardians. I know it is not to great a responsibility for one that learns so fast."

I realized what was the meaning of his words. Iason and I are only boys and we now had the responsibility of five other boys, all older then ourselves. Unlike much in our lives, this was not a game or a lesson, it was the future and lives of real people.

1312, the 9th month, 30th day:

These past days have been filled with events and have caused us much anxiety. We were recalled to the castle as several events unfolded during our absence. Two of our small fishing villages had supposedly been raided by pirates. Several of our people were killed and homes destroyed in each. All of the coastal villages have been temporarily abandoned. The people have been moved inland and the boats sailed along the coast and are now in the main harbor. It is believed these were only probes to test our defenses and readiness for battle. Our coast is steep, very rocky and the water shallow. The few fishing villages along it have only the most difficult passage inland, all easily defended from the high ground. Our war ships chased invaders away before any real damage could be done. By abandoning the villages, invaders will believe we have fewer eyes to see their activities.

Word has also come from the east that a large force is gathered, just before the high mountain pass, that is the only easy land access from another state. A few men have entered the country across the steep mountains on the north and south. Most of them have been killed or captured. Father believes they will try and coordinate an attack close to the full moon, which gives them some light for night movement and provides the highest tides. The eastern pass is almost always closed by the 12th month from deep snows.

He figures they will try and draw our forces to the coast with a series of small raids and then attack by land. When we rush reinforcements east they will attack in force from the sea. They had probably hoped to surprise us but it is now obvious they know we are aware of the situation.

We pages were very busy. Messages were flowing to every part of the castle and I could see the riders were leaving and arriving as almost a steady stream. Janus managed to find a short time to visit with us between his rides. He told us that when he rides east, 5 mounted solders accompany him. The council is meeting almost continuously and our sports and schooling has been suspended.

The council decided to employ our fastest but smallest war ships to cary a message to the neighboring state. We already knew the recent coastal raids had been launched from there.

Uncle Iason dictated his message, four scribes were put to recording it. He started out with his usual greetings. "Our port and border were closed on the 15 day of the 8th month for a

period of 90 days. They will be reopened on the 15th day of the 11 month. Our states have been friends and allies since any of us were founded. We have always come to each others aid when needed. This is one of those times. This kingdom needs the assistance of its neighbors. What is requested is simply your cooperation and nothing more. The Bishop of Florence and his allies are planning military action against us. Should they be so foolish as to implement these plans they will be crushed. The cost will be very high in the lives of those attackers. You can assist us by denying this unholy alliance access to your territory and ports during their preparations and any sanctuary as they reiterate. It has come to our attention that many of the mercenaries the Bishop has hired come from places ripe with pestilence..."

Three messages were signed and sealed by King Iason and dispatched forthwith. Janus carried one to the east. The knights all gathered around the big map table to discuss the battle plans. We could not see very well from our position, no one invited us closer, so all of us stood on our benches. One of the knights pointed to a place on the map. We know that they have sent spies into this area and this area over here. These men found exactly what we wanted them to find. The ones that found their way here and were killed, their information died with them.

We know they have 4 encampments eastward down the valley from the pass. The furthest is a two, hard day's march the closest is about a half day's march. We believe the 4th camp is reserves. We have spotters high up on the northern ridge line that will signal us when a substantial number move forward.

They will expect us to defend as the Greeks did at Thermopile and this time there is no secret way around. In that they are partly correct but only partly. The valley on our side is very narrow with a fast river and sheer walls. They can march no more than 4 abreast and the cavalry is limited to two abreast at best. Our archers will line the gap on both sides. If they send the cavalry in first we will stop them in the gap. If they send foot soldiers first we will let them pass into an area that is wider but where the river is against the vertical rock cliff. The other side is a high, steeply sided, terrace from which we can prevent them over topping. Where this wider spot narrows again a fast river cuts across it to a narrow opening. We have set up a defensive line across this point made of earth works and large boulders. "Knights, the invaders shall not pass," one said.

Along our defensive line are the cross bows and long bows, in the Welsh style, backed by cavalry and foot soldiers. Our other archers are all along the ridge line. Our cavalry is positioned behind the archers in both places. We appear to be outnumbered by about 5 to 1 but each defender on higher ground is worth 10 on the move and in the open. If it appears that their cavalry might break through we will cause a rock slide to block off the narrowest part of the passage, trapping them and preventing reinforcements.

"Are you prepared to deal with a mass surrender," Uncle Iason asked?

"Yes, Sire there is a small blind canyon not far away where prisoners can be detained for a few days. The nights are getting colder as the season advances and we are already seeing snow on the mountain tops. Food and medical supplies are in readiness."

Karyakos spoke next. "I fear this is a grand ruse on the Bishop's part. He must be aware of what happened when the Roman Legions tried the same move. The river ran red with their blood for days and they came in mid summer. No Roman made it west of that narrow

passage. I wonder if they will attack at all from that way. I suspect they are threatening so, to keep a large portion of our small army occupied. They must know we can not just withdraw as long as they have a strong presence at our eastern gate.

I am told that in the Frankish and Saxon lands much rain and cool weather has settled in for over a month now. Much of the harvest is rotting in the fields there. As you say the snow is falling on the mountain tops now, which is over a month early, is that correct scholars?"

The scholars had a mini conference and one answered, "it is Sire. We have no record of snow at this time of year."

"When the snow comes how long can we remain at our posts," the King asked.

"No more than two weeks Sire."

"Then let us pray for much snow to fall in the next two weeks. At the first sign of snow on the ground have the border guards tell their counterparts that they have instructions to withdraw when the snow reaches a man's knee in depth. I assume they are on friendly terms with them. Make sure they play the game to the end. These men are not our enemy but our neighbors. When the snow reaches that depth you can withdraw half of your forces, taking most of the archers and all of the foot soldiers. As more snow falls continue to withdraw forces leaving only the normal contingent at the snow line barracks. Try to maintain the lookouts as long as possible but do not keep men in dangerous situations needlessly.

Archimedes has given you a secret weapon to cause avalanches to further block the pass should they attempt some kind of winter invasion. I doubt they have the will or heart for it."

(TN: Arden did not know about this weapon before and he has no idea what it was but given what we know today, it was some combination of "Greek Fire" and gunpowder. The exact formula of "Greek Fire" has been lost but we do know it would burn in the presence of water and in fact some formulations seemed to need water to get it started. The gun powder we know about. Both of these things were known about by the scholars of this time. He speculated that Karyakos was underestimating the enemy.)

1312, the 10th month, 2nd day:

The highest tide of the month was due in 10 days time. Our work as pages was a little reduced today so we took the opportunity to bring Kleitos to our bedchamber. I knew him reasonably well but Iason did not. I had never had sex with him or any of the Koalhurst boys before. When we arrived Ikaros was between Alexandros' legs, his head was bobbing up and down giving some relief. Alexandros is average in size and skinny, being so underfed, his penis was huge for a boy of 15 years. He was already longer than most of the men I had seen. Jason and I wanted that cock in our butts just as soon as we could arrange it. From the look on Ikaros' face he was enjoying his task. Kleitos was just a bit taken aback at this. Iason and I lead him over to the chairs by the window. He was not stupid and he realized that sex among us boys was a probability now that he was in the Palace Boy's program and how open things in the dormitory are. Once Ikaros finished with Alexandros he went to fetch some wine for us. I guess he knew how to get Kleitos more comfortable.

We joined Alexandros by moving our chairs over to his bed. He was laying naked and seemed most comfortable being so. Iason and I removed our tunics and kilts. The physicians had given him a proper splint made of staves with wide leather straps that wrapped around his leg and the staves. The staves extended just below the foot. He told us that in a week or so he was told he could walk around using a crutch like device.

Ikaros returned and gave each of us goblets of wine. I noticed this was not children's wine but full strength. After a bit he got Kleitos to lay on our bed so Ikaros could give him a massage. Kleitos was a bit reluctant until Alexandros told him how good Ikaros was as did Iason and myself. In no time at all Kleitos was not only naked but begging Ikaros not to stop. I could see we would very soon have our way with him.

Kleitos' body glistened with the oil Ikaros was using and he seemed almost asleep as Iason and I move, one on each side of him. Ikaros moved off and Iason and I took over, letting our hands drift along his smooth, slick skin. Our touch is different but no less satisfying. Where Ikaros worked his fingers, and even his elbows into the boy's muscles we let our fingers play along the surface stopping in every erotic place either of us had come to know.

My favorite place are the round globes of his buttocks and the cleft between. Iason favors the underside of the upper leg. Soon Kleitos was laying on his back and my mouth was engulfing his erection. Kleitos was attempting to utter his sounds of contentment but Iason kept kissing him and pushing his tongue into his mouth. Soon I could feel his hands responding by grasping my masculinity and ever so carefully fondling it. He erupted and I drank all his offering. Iason complained I did not share so his mouth replace mine and mine his.

Before long Kleitos rolled to his side and I moved around so we could please each other with more oral pleasure. Iason was paying much attention to his anus and I could feel Kleitos stiffen as he was invaded for the first time by fingers and then by penis. Once Iason was spent he rolled Kleitos toward him and I began ministering to his love place. Sliding my stiff penis to it's limit on the first try.

Suddenly we were surrounded by naked bodies. Father, Uncle and Dysme joined us. Dysme positioned himself on his knees and we assisted Kleitos to his fucking position and with minor encouragement slid right in. Dysme loves to receive more than to give and kept saying so, giving Kleitos much encouragement. Uncle got behind me and Father behind Iason and demonstrated for Kleitos just what he should be doing to Dysme. I doubt that he needed the demonstration, I think fucking is one thing all animals just know how to do.

Iason and I were carried by our lovers into their bedchamber. I could see that Ikaros and Dysme were preparing to keep Kleitos company and noticed that while all this was going on Thanatos and Ouranos were paying much attention to Alexandros. I found this a bit strange since I had never seen those two have sex with anyone, other than each other or Karyakos.