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**Buried in the Past**

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**Summary**

Not everything is what is seems. Blair Sandburg, is the victim of a misunderstanding at the hands of a man he had beginning to see as a friend.
The usual wide range of humanity thronged the bullpen of Major Crimes and contributed to the buzz of activity. It was a day that had started like many others. Detectives tried, with varying degrees of patience, to take down the life histories of the suspects, miscreants and potential witnesses seated before them. Later, the detectives would regale each other with the creative embellishments they had to sift through to get to “just the facts.” An abandoned electrical kit on Ellison's desk was mute testimony to the ordinariness of the day… the bugging equipment that had been needed to track down the harassers of Ellison's young guide was due to be disconnected. More than one cop was waiting for the electrician to return from lunch and close one of the more disagreeable chapters in Major Crime history.

Simon swept into the bullpen with an expansive smile on his face. He was having a wonderful morning! His son had asked if he could meet his father for lunch, despite their recent disagreements over Daryl's GDP student placement. //Looks like Daryl figured out that his old man could be right sometime.// In addition to the overture from his son, the departmental meeting with the Chief of Police and Commissioner had gone well for once. More than well. Simon himself had been singled out for praise for his handling of the whole “sentinel thing.” The Commissioner's words regarding the singular transfer of an entire sentinel clan to the Cascade Police Department were especially flattering. Simon Banks was becoming known as the Cascade PD “expert” on things sentinel. Simon chuckled again as he remembered thinking when Jim had first come on-line that he should get a pay raise for the additional duty of “Den Mother” to the sentinel and his guide. It sounded as if that might actually happen. Banks grinned as he spotted “his” sentinel over by the communal coffee pot. //What the heck, I should find out what they’re drinking these days.// He sauntered over to get a cup of the bullpen's coffee. Jim Ellison was just putting another teaspoon of sugar into the dark brew and Simon grinned as the sentinel looked around nervously. //Making sure the kid doesn't spot him and give him another lecture on the evils of refined sugar.// The detective looked relaxed and almost friendly, a stark difference from the man's attitude a few short months ago. The sentinel quirked an eyebrow as Simon poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Hey, Captain. Something wrong with your coffee maker?" There was a note of humor in the quiet question. The times that Simon had poured himself a cup of the coffee that his detectives drank could be counted on the fingers of one hand… not including the thumb.

Simon shrugged. “Just making sure that this sludge won't poison my entire staff.”

“Always looking out for us. Right, Captain?” The humor was more pronounced had even invaded the icy blue eyes.

“And don’t you forget it, Detective.” Simon commented as he took a deep pull on the coffee. He made a face that would not have been out of place on his teenager's face. "With your enhanced senses how can you drink this stuff?"

“Blair made it."

Simon grinned. Ellison's tone said plainer than any words that that was reason enough for him. Jim continued as if he hadn't noticed Simon's reaction.

"Can't you taste it, Captain? First the flavor of the coffee, then the slightest hint of vanilla and ...." 

"Jim, we're not all sentinels. You don't have to convince me that this is superior coffee to someone with…”
…“superior senses.” Ellison interjected with a deadpan expression.

“Okay, Jim.” Simon raised both hands in a surrender gesture. The captain was surprised, and pleased, that Ellison had actually cracked a joke about his enhanced senses. It made a nice change from the surly dislike Ellison had always shown for his sentinel abilities. Another point in favor of the guide. “I retract any slur on the kid’s coffee. But I think I’ll stick with my own brews. Speaking of the kid… I was on the phone with Harris earlier. Tipp made the call to the station about your truck being stolen. He saw Blair with the truck and knew that Evans had a thing about guides. Lo and behold, Evans’ son Trevor is studying at Rainier, so one guess where he got the information from for the call.” Simon held up a hand to stop Jim's protest. "Before you say anything, Jim, Evans is going to have an up close and personal talk with his son, so I think we can say that that is now covered. Right?” Simon willed Ellison to answer correctly. He got an absent nod in return and Simon realized that the sentinel was distracted. He followed Ellison's line of sight.

Banks wasn't even conscious of the fact that he moved. Anger flared and was reflected across his face as the primal need of a parent to protect his young surfaced at what he saw. Blair Sandburg was sitting in HIS office with HIS son. The guide was leaning forward, his face only inches away from his young son. One slender hand was holding Daryl's forearm and the other hand rested on the boy's shoulder. Daryl looked distressed and rational thought fled. Suddenly, all Simon's earlier fears and reservations about the tactile nature of the sentinel/guide bond resurfaced in one moment of blinding anger.

Jim was caught off-guard by his captain’s reaction. He was still trying to find a reason for Simon's suddenly pounding heart, the increase in his respiration when the bigger man all but ran across to his office. A snarled oath was his first indication of just what had set the captain off… and the implications held Jim immobile for a shocked instant. An instant too long…

"The little pervert." Simon ground out between his teeth even as he crossed to his office in five long strides. The door rocked on its hinges as he erupted into the room. Two startled faces turned toward him. Simon heard his son cry out in protest as he reached for the guide but he ignored everything but his need to deal with the man touching his son.

Blair was deep into his scan when the door crashed against the wall. Before he could react, a large hand grabbed the nape of his neck. Anger, fear, worry, disgust flooded his empathic system and stole control of his body from him. The pain of the emotional attack was joined by pain of a more physical sort as he was tossed onto the top of the captain's desk. He crashed into the computer and took it with him as he rolled onto the floor. He landed heavily, re-igniting the pain from the injuries he had sustained in the hit and run attempt by the GDP officer. He almost blacked out from the combined assault but struggled to retain his hold on consciousness, trying desperately to understand what was happening…. He was dragged to his feet and through blurred eyesight he caught sight of Simon Banks. A huge fist blotted out the captain's face as it headed for his own. //Simon? Why?// The blow landed and pain tumbled him into nothingness before he could voice his shocked question. He never saw his enraged sentinel pull the captain off him…

The Dark Sentinel powered into Simon as the larger man went to hit his already unconscious victim. All thoughts of his friendship with the Captain, and the fact that the man was his superior officer, were forgotten in the fury raised by the unprovoked attack on his now silent guide. Even as Ellison was about to throw the blow which would have put his captain down, Rafe and H launched themselves at Jim. The ex-Ranger almost succeeded in brushing them away, so intent was he to get the person who had hurt his guide. Even as H yelled for Rhonda to get the GDP Commander up there fast, Captain Taggart came hurrying into the bullpen. The sounds of fighting had carried into his office across the hall.
Daryl was screaming at his father. Kept screaming until the sentinel threw his father away from Blair and the other detectives tackled him. Before his father could try for the guide again, the teenager skirted past the struggling men and knelt at Sandburg's side. He pulled the computer equipment off the limp body and gasped as he saw the blood that now coated the left side of the guide's face. Half remembered first aid lessons kicked in and Daryl felt for a pulse in the guide's throat. //Thank you, God!// The unvoiced prayer ran through his mind as a slow, steady beat met his touch. Daryl ignored his father's enraged shouts as he shifted papers and binders off the crumpled body of the man he had come to admire and begun to think of as a friend. He stayed by Sandburg's side as yet more cops rushed into the fray. Finally, Jim was pinned down as Taggart held Banks against the wall. The sentinel still struggled against his captors, sounding more like his panther spirit guide than human.

Dan Slater barrelled into Major Crime and focused in on the small office crowded with men. Rhonda hovered worriedly outside the door, her hands clasped together and a look of shock on her face. Slater moved her gently to one side and murmured a quick, “We'll get it sorted out.” He hurried into the captain's office and stopped short, not quite able to believe what his eyes seemed to be telling him. Taggart still held off of a now quiet Simon Banks. The Major Crime captain's face held a strange mix of fury and shame. Jim Ellison was pinned to the floor under the weight of three detectives. All that Slater saw in a glance before his attention was riveted on the crumpled body lying amidst the wreckage of a computer and desk chair. //Oh hell. Not Sandburg!// A young boy was crouched by the unconscious guide's side.

“What the hell happened here?” Slater snapped even as he went to his knees next to the guide. “Dad... Dad... went crazy. He *punched* Blair!” Daryl's voice held shock and disbelief. Slater watched as Ellison tried again to throw off his captors. The Commander wasn't sure if Ellison wanted to get to his guide... or to the man who had attacked the young empath. He was going to make the choice easy for the sentinel.

"Get Banks out of here, then release Jim." Taggart pushed Banks out into the bullpen and all but shoved him into the chair behind Rhonda's desk. Once Slater was sure Banks was gone he ordered, “Let him go.” The police officers scattered, hands held before them in a gesture of appeasement. The angry sentinel ignored them to go straight to his guide. He gathered the smaller body against his own and carried him into a more defensible corner. There the sentinel hunkered down, his guide clutched tightly; noise remarkably similar to growls vibrating from his throat.

Slater carefully backed every one out, leaving sentinel and guide alone. He even more carefully closed the door before turning to the Captain of Major Crime.

"What the hell happened in there, Simon?" Slater didn't know what to make of the outraged betrayal he thought he saw in Banks' dark eyes. He got his answer...

"Sandburg was all over my son. The little pervert was..." Gone was the urbane police captain Slater was beginning to call friend. In his place stood outraged fatherhood. Banks' tirade was stopped cold by the shaking voice of his son.

"He... he was helping me understand, Dad. I *asked* him to..." Daryl was interrupted by his father.

"Son, you don't understand what touch means to his kind. He..." Simon stepped forward to put an arm around his son, wanting to, needing to wipe away the distress on his son's face. Simon faltered as Daryl backed away from him, shaking his head in disbelief.

"DAD, I know touching and *touching* and it was not anything like that. I asked him if he could tell if I was an empath. He was helping me, explaining things and you hurt him. You hurt a guide."
accusation was said with such total disbelief that Simon cringed inwardly. "You hurt him." Daryl repeated, staring at his father as if he had never truly seen him before.

"Son, I…" A shudder ran through Simon's body as he remembered the startled blue eyes staring at him before he swung the fist that closed them. There had been no guilt on the guide's face, just shock… and then pain. Simon closed his eyes as he realized that he had taken an act of friendship and made it into something tawdry. "God, no." It was whispered…he had thought himself beyond that...had it only been minutes since he was congratulating himself on being the Cascade PD "expert" on things sentinel? //God… he had the lessons of Blair's dream journals and the example of the modern day sentinel and guide; how could he have misconstrued … how could he have thought? Dammit, he was still too much a product of his culture to be dealing with sentinels and guides for whom touch was as essential as breathing and not….// Simon forced himself to stop analysing his mistake and address its correction. Fortunately, he had a real expert at hand.

"Dan, how do we…" Simon looked at his friend, not quite sure what he was asking. He began again, gesturing in the direction of the feral being who had replaced his best detective. "Jim… well…" Slater answered the unfinished question.

"Very carefully, Simon. First off, get Edwards and Harvey up here and Lisa, if you can find her. He might not let me near him, but Lisa is from his clan, and the other two are Sentinel Primes who acknowledge his authority. It might calm him down if he has protection for his guide."

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Blair was lost in an ocean of sensation, nothing existed outside the pain of body and mind. He didn't know how much time passed, couldn't even phrase the question, when he felt the aggressive emotions of his sentinel cascade through him. The killing rage awoke the Dark Guide and he responded, instinctively taking the edge off the sentinel's anger so that thought might return…. to both sentinel and guide. Blair struggled with *the other* but the argument was short-lived. The Dark Guide was ready to deal with the apparent betrayal by their leader. Blair was not. Dark blue eyes opened to assess the situation and then closed again as the guide fought to take small breaths to ease the pain in his ribs. Blair felt the other retreat momentarily although plans streamed through his mind.

Rafe watched cautiously from the door. He felt very much like he was guarding a bomb that was ticking down to an explosion. Ellison… if that still was Ellison… was crouched over the fallen guide. And he was not happy. Rafe had a clear understanding of the old saw, "If looks could kill."

Light blue eyes held an arctic cold and a blazing heat at the same time. He was grateful for Henri's comforting presence beside him. "Thank God we got his gun off him, H. It could have been a lot worse, you know." Brown shrugged. "It still could be a lot worse, babe, if Hairboy doesn't come around soon.” Both detectives let out an unconscious sigh of relief as dark blue eyes opened and scanned the room quickly before closing again. The sentinel ran a shaking hand down the side of the younger man's face. This time the guide's gaze locked onto the sentinel's eyes and stayed there.

The sentinel's attention was focused on his guide but he still kept track of the people outside the room. Rage still simmered beneath the guide's calming influence. The panther persona was screaming to be allowed out and only Blair's innate understanding kept it at bay. As one, Sentinel and Guide turned their faces to the doorway as someone entered. Silent communication determined that defense would take precedence over revenge.

Slater entered the room, carefully. "Jim, can you hear me?" Daniel mentally kicked himself. //Of course the sentinel heard him. Whether he was capable of understanding him was another question. A question about to be tested.// Slater refused to show fear, even though his heartbeat probably gave the lie to his calmness. He had seen Jim Ellison as detective, sentinel and Dark Sentinel. What was sizing him up now was something even more alien than the pure Dark Sentinel; it was something
more dangerous even than that. He tempered his voice, tried to infuse certainty into his tone. "No one wants to hurt Blair, Jim." That got him a wordless snarl. He changed tack. "Sentinel, no one wants to harm the guide. What happened was an accident, a misunderstanding. He is in no danger. Jim! Come on, it's all right to let go. The Sentinel is not needed but Jim Ellison is. Blair needs Jim…” Still talking softly, Slater inched closer… and stopped as the guide made the first move.

Blair was unsteady as he pushed out of his sentinel's hold. He patted his sentinel's arm absently as, with a snarl, the sentinel moved so that he could get between his headstrong guide and the perceived threat. Keeping an arm pressed against his ribs, Blair managed to get his knees under him and a hand onto his sentinel's shoulder. He struggled to rise. Ellison snapped something too quietly for anyone but the guide to hear. His protest, order, whatever was ignored and Ellison unhappily helped the younger man to his feet. Blair felt something strong and… dark… rise up in him and he gave it free reign. The plans he'd *shared* earlier had sounded good to him. He turned and faced the GDP Commander// Blair supplied the identity to the Dark Guide.

Slater caught his breath. This was the Dark Guide, he knew that instinctively. Blair Sandburg had all the courage and tenacity that filled the blue eyes that met his but the mocking assessment in them did not belong to the compassionate grad student he had come to admire. //Great! Just great. Not one throwback but two!// One thing was clear, before he could tackle the appearance of the Dark Guide, he needed to get Jim to calm down. The sentinel was in blessed protector overdrive. He addressed his words to the Dark Guide.

"Do you think you can get him to stand down, Guide? The watchman is no longer needed." Dan asked it gently, making sure that he kept his voice soothing and his emotions firmly held in place.

"But the warrior is!" The comeback was snarled. Blair Sandburg's drive for understanding, his willingness to give anyone the benefit of the doubt had been superseded by the Dark Guide's wariness. Slater took an involuntary step backward. It was quite clear that this version of Sandburg did not recognize his authority. It was clearly evident to Simon Banks as well. Memories of the strong loyalties belonging to another time, another place prompted the Captain to action.

Simon swore as he brushed past the detectives. H dropped a cautioning hand on his arm and he snapped, “Let go of me.” The detective obeyed with gratifying speed. Simon ordered harshly, “Everyone back off, NOW.” They didn't move fast enough to suit him and Simon barked, "Do it.” Then it was just Slater standing next to him inside his office. Slater spoke levelly, confirming what Simon already knew, "Blair has gone into the dark guide persona. We need to keep him calm and allow the real Blair to come back." Simon nodded. “My job, Dan. My men. And my mistake.”

He moved into the room toward the battered Guide and his protector. He kept his hands down even as Jim started to growl louder, his body coiling to spring. Simon spoke quietly, trying to keep his emotions calm. The worse thing that he could do was to allow his emotions to bleed through to the empath. "Blair, it was an accident, a stupid accident, I thought you were going to hurt Daryl. I am sorry." He reached a hand out "Please, Blair."

The Dark Guide shook his head. The younger man was clearly on edge, his hand moving in short sharp motions on the Dark Sentinel's shoulder. He challenged softly. “There was no threat, yet you attacked.” Simon wondered what optical illusion had him thinking that Sandburg's flannel and jeans had been replaced with black tunic and hose.

Simon answered quickly. "NO," then gentled his voice. "No, it was a misunderstanding. I thought you were hurting my son. Blair understands this, a father's love for his son can make him blind to the facts. Make him do the wrong thing for what he thinks are the best of reasons."

Sandburg tipped his head to one side. There was still that mocking assessment in the blue eyes but he
seemed to be listening to him. Simon took that as a good sign. Maybe understanding, even forgiveness, was possible.

Slater listened and watched the by-play between the two men. He was surprised to see that the Dark Guide was actually calming down. A bit of the gentle, accepting anthropologist suffused the soft answer.

"Yes, it can."

Simon nodded and took a breath. //Now for the hard part// "Can you calm Jim down? The Clan will need him, they need their Sentinel Prime." No one moved as the young empath came to a decision. Slater gaped in surprise as Simon's request was honored. The fierceness of the Dark Guide was tempered by the compassion of the student of mankind as Blair turned to his sentinel.

Dark Blair's hand slowed and the short movements became a firm caress of his sentinel's shoulder. The deep, compelling voice talked softly, practically cooing as he calmed the rage of the sentinel. Blair looked past them and saw the panther pacing up and down in the office. The wolf was snarling by its side, lips pulled back showing large teeth as it stalked around Slater and Simon. As the sentinel calmed under his guide's soothing touch, the panther calmed as well. Eventually, the big cat allowed the wolf to lead it to the side of the sentinel. A nudge from the wolf and the panther persona folded back into the sentinel.

Ellison … //no, not just Ellison but Dark Sentinel// Slater corrected himself…reached for his guide. Slater relaxed. //Okay, now that Ellison's back… more or less… and Blair is safe… a little bonding and things will be back to normal.// Slater almost groaned aloud as his pleasant little fantasy was destroyed by the guide's recalcitrance.

"No. Not here." Blair was swaying badly, keeping to his feet with effort and the crutch of the Captain's desk. The look he threw Simon was pure Dark Guide. He put a hand out and Jim slid an arm around his waist. "Get me out of here, Sentinel." Their reactions proved that neither Captain nor Commander mistook that for anything but what it was… an order. Had Blair been more himself he might have chuckled at their identical stunned expressions. A quiet commotion in the outer office heralded the arrival of reinforcements. Blair felt the churning emotions of the sentinels even through the efforts of their guides to damp them. But that trouble was nothing compared to the emotional upheaval of the Major Crime personnel. No one could believe what had happened… //Have to do so'thing about that later// Blair admonished himself. He had to lean into his sentinel; his legs felt like rubber and his head was thumping fiercely from the emotions he was channelling. He was losing control, was only vaguely aware of Jim helping him from the office. As he lost control, the Dark Sentinel came alert.

“Damn, Rafe. He needs help.” H put a hand out to offer that help only to have his wrist caught by Rafe. "Don't touch him, H, his barriers might be low. Let the experts help." Rafe nodded toward the three sentinel-guide pairs waiting at Rhonda's desk. They did not wait patiently. No sooner had Jim and Blair cleared Simon's doorway than they were moving… surprisingly, the guides took the lead.

David and Jon, the two Guide Primes, quickly left their sentinels and reached for Blair. Ellison pulled him back tightly against him. David said softly, "Please, Sentinel Prime, allow us to help him." When Ellison just glared at him, David tried another avenue. He hesitated and then requested formally, "Senior Guide Prime, let us help you." All the guides could feel Blair's distress. The young guide was holding it together only because he feared for his sentinel but he was tiring rapidly. And though Jon and David stood ready to assist, both men knew that caution was called for - both had felt the power of the dark guide before. Even physically and emotionally stressed, Blair could damage them even as he threw them out of any link they attempted. Now was not the time to push him, better
that he allow them to help him. “Please, Blair,” David coaxed, “Let us help you so you can help Jim.” Deep blue eyes tracked from guide to guide; a decision was made and a curly head nodded.

“S’right, Jmm. Lemme settle, then you come, ’k?” Sandburg patted Ellison’s arm comfortingly before tottering over to his fellow guides. Sentinel Prime Edwards stepped in front of Ellison and said quietly, “It is all right, Senior Prime. He needs the help of guides. My guide will help him until you arrive.” As Ellison started to push him away, Blair said with a touch of authority, "Lissen to him, Jim.” Ellison grudgingly turned toward Edwards.

Blair reached a hand out and the two other guides collected him in. "We’ll take him down to the sentinel suite and help him get centered.” Jon put all the assurance he could muster into his next words. "He will be all right, Senior Sentinel Prime." Despite the emotional turmoil Ellison was fighting he recognized that for a promise. And he knew that his young guide trusted his older counterpart, guide to Doctor Sentinel Harvey. Jon Windsor was in his mid-thirties, the seriousness with which he conducted himself tended to hide a wicked sense of humor that had more than once brought Blair to laughter in times of stress. Ellison approved of anyone who could do that. He nodded his head jerkily, ice blue eyes promising retribution if his promise wasn't kept.

Lisa released Karl with a nod and he followed the other three empaths out of the room. This was Guide Business and the sentinels would not be needed until later. Commander Slater went with them, opting to let Banks handle the sentinel end of things. The Commander got the distinct impression that his presence was only being tolerated because of the Dark Guide's acceptance of him at the Bonding.

The sentinels moved up on Ellison. The Dark Sentinel was still angry but the killing rage had been quashed. Simon could see they were talking but it was at sentinel level. When Jim looked at him he could see the anger flare and he knew his actions were the topic of discussion. It was an unnerving sensation, even more so when Ellison tried to move toward him. Doctor Harvey and Edwards blocked him, sparking another argument full of emotions but soundless to non-sentinel ears. Ellison tried once more to approach his captain and again, the sentinels blocked him. Harvey said something and Ellison deflated. Jim turned on his heel and headed out of the office, the door barely on its hinges in his wake. There was more subvocal conversation and then two female sentinels followed Ellison, leaving Edwards to sort everything else out.

Edwards turned toward Rafe and extended his hand. "I will take the Sentinel Prime's weapon and return it to him."

Rafe handed it across. "He, I mean, they will be okay, won't they?"

"Blair is in the care of the other guides. They will help him center and then Jim will join him and they will heal together. What I need to know now is what happened here. Captain?"

Simon took a shuddering breath. "It was my fault. All of it." He gestured Edwards ahead of him and ordered. "My office."

Daryl had moved onto the edge of a chair in his father's office. He took no notice of the sentinel following his father but jumped in, reiterating his earlier protest. "Dad, Blair was not doing anything wrong. He wasn't in my space, he was explaining something to me and answering a question I had. That was all. There was no need to hurt him.” Daryl's disappointment in his father was too evident in the dark eyes that avoided looking at Simon.

Simon nodded. "I know that now, son. If I had thought, I would have known it then too. It was just....", he trailed off, big hands rubbing weary eyes.
Daryl looked to the other sentinel and asked, "Is he okay?"

Edwards smiled reassuringly. "He will be, son. Between the guides and his sentinel, not to mention Doctor Harvey, he will be fine. I'm sure that Blair would not mind if you waited outside the sentinel suite until Doctor Harvey can tell you that herself." The boy was off like a shot.

Edwards watched as Simon Banks set his chair back in place and sank into it with a heavy sigh. The sentinel frowned. Something was not right here. He would have sworn that Simon Banks would be the last person to turn on Ellison's young guide… and not just because he knew how much his best detective depended on him. Banks had always struck him as a man of integrity who was well aware of the pitfalls of prejudice. What had changed that? "Do you need to talk Captain". The offer obviously surprised Banks as much as it surprised him to hear it come out of his mouth.

Simon wasn't sure that he had heard the sentinel correctly, at first. Edwards had never hit him as being the sort of person who would discuss anything emotional with anyone other than his guide. And Edwards had to know that any conversation about his…dammit, admit it!… attack on Blair Sandburg was bound to be emotional. Still, it wouldn't hurt to try to explain. Might even call it a dry run before I explain to another sentinel what an ass I was. Simon rubbed a large hand over his face. "How the hell did everything get out of control in such a short time, Edwards?"

"You know the answer to that better than I, Captain." Edwards' voice was non-judgemental. It gave Simon the courage to continue.

"I… hell, all I could remember were the things I had heard about guides, especially rogue guides. And then there is the way that Blair is always plastered to Jim. I thought I had a handle on that. That I knew why touch is so important between sentinel and guide." Simon gave an embarrassed shrug. "Maybe I was wrong, no…I *was* wrong. I put two and two together and came up with eight. How the hell could I do that, Edwards? To a *kid*, for God's sake, who's had more than his fair share of trouble and hurt through no fault of his own. I thought I was beyond this. It was so easy to believe the lies. My own people suffered because of lies and bigotry and I still…God! What have I done?"

The guides settled down onto the bonding platform and eased the Dark Guide down onto the padded surface. The younger man was just barely conscious, dazed blue eyes flickering from face to face as if trying to decide if they were friends or foes. "Blair," Jon spoke quietly, "you need to get your paths back under control. We can help but you must let us."

"J...mm?" There was a plaintive quality to the slurred name, like a kid caught in a nightmare calling for a big brother to come make it right.

"Easy, Blair. Jim's coming but you could both be hurt if you're not centered. Let us help?" A glimmer of recognition entered the blue eyes. "jh..on? dave?"

"Karl is here too, kid. The guides of your clan. Here to help." Slowly, Jon lay down and pulled the younger man into arms, spooning behind him, getting an arm around his waist. Dave lay down facing Blair and pulled a curly head onto his shoulder. He ran soothing fingers through the long dark hair, trying to erase the headache he knew the younger guide was suffering. Karl hovered, ready to assist in any way possible but letting the senior guides lead the way. Physical connection established, the guides reached out mentally. Dave bit back an oath as he experienced the… anger, shock, disbelief, mistrust, killing rage, sorrow… flashing through the kid's pathways. He was grateful for Karl's hand coming to rest on his shoulder, lending his support and strength.

"Dammit. How does he handle this?" Dave tightened his grip on the trembling body. Every single last, first and in-between emotion of all the people in Major Crime during the *incident* - that is
what the *assault* would be called, Dave thought with well justified cynicism - was preserved in the young guide's mind and body. As they connected with ragged nerves, Jon's and Dave's own systems began to crackle and hum. They needed to get the kid calmed down before he overloaded them too. And the young guide needed to be centered before they brought him to his sentinel for bonding. The kid had done a good job of drawing off his sentinel's anger but if he bonded now the turmoil that ravaged the kid would re-ignite the anger in his sentinel. Both men could slip into a dangerous state. Dangerous to themselves and others.

David glanced at Jon over the curly head of Blair. "Don't try and channel it all yourself."

"Okay, Dave. I'm ready. Let's see if we can get Dark Blair here to go back in his box." Karl's face mirrored his confusion at that identification. David saw and said quickly, “We'll explain later, Karl. As much as we know.” Then the men dove into the maelstrom.

As he felt them enter his mind, Blair tried to pull free from their hold. But there were too many hands and he hurt too badly and… He was pinned on his stomach, a knee in his back, and his hands held down on the platform above his head. Panic took over and he struggled, the accumulated emotions of the Bullpen burnt away by memory driven horror. The guides weathered the initial cleansing and then started to channel, but it was soon obvious that it was not working. The power was still blazing, fed by the young guide's own tormented past. They kept trying… and failing. Jon began a quiet, rhythmic chant. “Blair, Blair, Blair… it's okay. Jim's coming. It's okay. Jim's coming.” The repetition of his sentinel's name seemed to help as much, if not more, as their attempts to channel.

Jim stalked the corridors to the suite; the other sentinels running interference for him. Doctor Harvey called back over her shoulder. "We'll be back later to write out a statement, okay?" She shrugged as an awed agreement floated back. She could almost feel a little sorry for the thug; now was not the time to break custody and try an escape past the Dark Sentinel. Ellison had taken the escapee down without breaking stride, nothing and no one was going to get in his way to his guide.

Slater, unnoticed and forgotten in the background, could see that Sandburg was slowly calming down. The sweat on the faces of the other guides showed that their efforts were taking a toll from them. Finally, Blair's body went limp, his muscles relaxing. The older guides sat up, careful to keep a hand on their patient's arm. Blair curled up on the bonding platform, his arm supporting his ribs, eyes open and searching. What… who he searched for, arrived. Jim came through the door, a man on a mission. Jon and David rolled off the platform and joined Karl on the floor. Slater watched as the three guides folded to their knees and then touched their heads to the floor as the Dark Sentinel came in, an instinctive reaction to the emotions pouring off the man. Ellison went past them as if they didn't exist. Slater could no longer take for granted the *traditional* guide postures. It now bothered him to see other men kneeling to any man… even guides to a Dark Sentinel. The young guide's remembered voice filled his mind. They had been sitting in Blair's office waiting to lay the trap for the people harassing the young professor. Blair had been nervous and hiding it by lecturing Slater on his research into sentinel lore.

>>See, Commander, it's been hypothesised that guides and sentinels both are capable of tapping into the collective human experience. Many of the guide/sentinel behaviors were formulated in an era when gestures of obeisance were common among men and women of all ranks. Not that long ago, historically speaking, Englishmen knelt to be knighted. Many Catholics still kneel to kiss the Pope's ring. It was understood that it was the rank that entitled the courtesy. It had a different meaning when it was unforced. It was when the use of such gestures fell out of fashion and sent a different message that it began to imply a difference in actual worth of the individual doing the kneeling; that the gesture became associated with worship… and slavery. Sentinels are not gods, even though some of them act like it. That made guides slaves. Guides still kneel today - sometimes, when I do so to Jim, it is because we are not, at least emotionally, in the modern place or time, Commander. Our
*memories,* our *sense* of ourselves are colored by a different understanding. But most times, guides kneel because we are made to kneel. It is not a gesture of respect but a symbol of subservience. Do you see the difference, Commander? Between a culturally significant gesture with layers of meaning and understanding tied into it and the use of the same gesture as a means to reinforce stereotypes? It was all right for Sir Raleigh to kneel to Elizabeth, no one thought less of him for doing so. But when I or Jon or David, when any guide kneels to a sentinel, or even worse, to a GDP guard, what the public sees is a person willing to abase himself. Jim, I think, understands this instinctively. It is why he does not want me to kneel in public… or private… but there are times when the old significance becomes real again. Then he does accept, even need, the gesture. The kid had flashed a wide smile and finished. Just call us throwbacks! <<

Something of Blair's “emotional other times and place” was in the air of the small room. But Slater recognized that, had he not had that so enlightening talk with the anthropologist, he would have seen men cowering before their superior. //What a mess. Atavistic instincts and modern culture clashing.// Slater was surprised to realize that he was hoping that two men could mediate that clash. Could come up with a way to give guides their freedom without condemning sentinels to madness and without starting witch hunts by the *normal* humans. As he watched Ellison sink onto the platform, observed the care and respect with which the larger man handled his younger companion, Dan began to believe they could do it. After all, they had already affected him!

Ellison gathered his guide to him, his hands running over the smaller man. Blair pushed Jim so that he was on his back and then leaned over him, looking down into blue eyes shades lighter than his own. Dark Guide and Dark Sentinel looked at each other. Blair linked and felt the panther's aggression course through his sentinel. The smile he gave one was of sardonic pleasure; this power was his to command, the most lethal of predators. The anthropologist recognized an atavistic memory being played out but the Dark Guide only knew that *this* felt right.

"Serve and protect, Sentinel." It was a command from the past.

"Protect and Serve you, Guide." But the answering promise was for the present and the future.

Slater suddenly moved forward. The last time he had heard that was in the bonding suite at the conference when Jim had sworn his life and strength to his guide. Just like then, Jim was no longer in charge of the partnership, had placed his power into the hands of the dark guide. When he edged closer, Doctor Harvey's hand lashed out, as she ordered,

"Stay out of it, Slater, this is sentinel business, not yours. You are permitted here because the Dark Pair believes you can learn. But don't press too close or you will press your luck."

Slater was about to argue. Then Lisa Pais was in front of him, anger radiating off her and he wisely backed away. He realised that whatever state the dark pair was in was affecting the other sentinels as well. His mind went back to the Hunting Pack and the legends of sentinels hunting down and pulling a man limb from limb with their bare hands for going against the Clan. Looking at Lisa, he could easily believe that.

Doctor Harvey spoke gently as she knelt down. “Senior Sentinel Prime, I need to check your guide for injuries. I am the Healer of your Clan and this is my right and duty.” Jim nodded. Secure in the bond, he could allow that approach. But Harvey was not yet finished. "Senior Guide Prime, my touch cannot hurt you. And your sentinel stands watch." Her hands were gentle as she used sentinel touch to identify cracked ribs and bruises. She murmured her findings. “He has not done his ribs any good but there has been no additional damage. He will be very sore tomorrow, Jim. I recommend a good hot soak and that he actually takes the medication I prescribe.” Asperity crept into her tone, she and the young guide had had their *discussions* about “natural remedies” versus “artificial chemical
crap.” Sometimes the older sentinel thought that Ellison allowed his young guide a bit too much leeway. Even after all the years they had been together, Jon rarely forgot his place. She heard a gasp and wide blue eyes stared into her own with … disappointment? Regret? Sorrow? And she understood that somehow the young man she was treating had read her thought. //His place? What did I mean by that?// She whispered softly, “Senior Guide Prime, I respect your bonding and join in honor of it.”

She placed her hand onto the shoulder of the dark guide and felt his mind sweep across hers. She took a deep breath at the sensation, he was going deeper than any empath other than Jon had ever been able to go. For a moment, sheer reflex prompted her to fight. Then she looked into his eyes and saw knowledge and wisdom that should not belong to one so young. She opened up to him and reached for her guide. Jon connected into the link and the two empaths met. Blair brushed across Jon's mind, soothingly. Then Dark Blair opened his paths enough to allow Jon and *his* sentinel to feel the mind and soul of the dark guide, the aggression and strength of the dark sentinel, and the brilliant and complex web that bound them together.

Ellison said quietly, “Do you feel it, Doctor? This is how it was meant to be. A sharing of strengths, mutual respect and protection. A partnership, not master and slave. Guides are more than organic tools but part of a team.” Harvey had tears in her eyes. She ached for something she hadn't known existed. The physical and mental ease between the two men. The touches that comforted and supported and didn't tease or arouse as society warned they would. And a relationship that went beyond friendship and brotherhood into the comradeship of those tested and tried by danger and violence. She understood the complementary nature of their respective gifts; the physical problems of the hypersensitive state were alleviated by the guide's presence just as the empathic vulnerabilities were defended by the sentinel's strength. Ellison held out a hand to Lisa. She reached for Karl and sentinel and guide shared in the linkage. Finally, Jim put a hand out to David. For a moment Edward's guide hesitated but he was an empath, he knew that something extraordinary and important was happening, something that called to him. He accepted Jim's touch and swayed briefly as the dark guide linked with him. He knelt with the other sentinels and guides. A cone of linkage was coming into being and the center was the dark pair. With the link came knowledge and power as doors in the minds of the guides and sentinels opened that training and cultural conditioning had closed off.

Jim had become somewhat accustomed to the magic of a true bond. Even as his clan's sentinels and guides were enthralled by the potential and possibilities inherent in their natures, he had been monitoring his guide's condition. When he felt the stress of maintaining the linkage turn into distress, he tugged at his guide through the link. And smiled in satisfaction as his headstrong guide turned to him, nodded and withdrew the linkage. The young guide reached for his sentinel and Jim engulfed him in his arms.

Doctor Harvey and Lisa gathered their guides. Both pairs moved to bond without any conscious thought, or embarrassment, that others would see them link. The guides curled up, heads resting on their sentinels' laps, comforting arms draped around their shoulders. Their need to connect was very real, the sore pathways caused by the channelling of the Dark Guide's emotions in dire need of healing. But sore pathways were a small price to pay for the glimpse of how it could, should be, between sentinel and guide.

Slater was a silent and much bemused witness. Even he, with neither enhanced senses nor empathy, could tell that something had just occurred that had the potential to upset some jealously guarded apple carts.

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Simon Banks hesitated outside of the sentinel suite. Talking with Edwards, and then his son, had calmed him somewhat but it would still not be easy to do what he knew he must. A proud man,
apology didn’t come easy to Simon Banks but it came easier than letting an injustice stand. He owed it to his friend, no… to his *friends,* for that is what the young guide had become. They both needed to hear his apology and to know that he knew why it had happened and that it wouldn't happen again. At least Daryl had understood. After they had talked, he had suggested that his son remain while he spoke to Blair. Daryl had been present when he had attacked the young guide, it seemed only fair that he be present when he apologised. But his son had shaken his head and said, “I know you will do the right thing, Dad. And you gave me a lot to think about. I’d rather go home. Okay?” They had shared a hug that had gone a long way to restoring the respect and trust father and son had been working on since Daryl's involvement with Blair's harassers. Daryl's last words still rang in Simon's ears. “Remember, Dad, you're not the only Banks man to let prejudice blind him to reality. You helped me see what I was doing. This will help you. Love you, Dad.” Simon shook his head. His son would be a fine man some day… and Simon knew that some of the credit for that belonged to men he was about to see. He squared his shoulders and opened the door.

Simon was surprised to see Slater. The GDP commander was tucked away in a corner of the suite, a watchful expression on his face. Harvey and Pais were on the platform, their guides tucked up against them. Wonderment was written on the women's faces. Karl was also on the platform, sitting cross-legged at a distance from the sentinel/guide pairs and a… wistful… expression in his eyes. None of the sentinels or guides paid any attention to his presence until the Senior Sentinel Prime looked up as he approached.

Tension crackled in the air as blue eyes met and held brown. Simon was relieved to see that Jim Ellison was now back firmly in place. At least he would be dealing with his friend and not… whatever that was in his office. Blair was cradled against Ellison's broad chest, his head resting on his sentinel's shoulder, his hands holding onto the back of Jim's sweater. Unbidden, Ellison's voice popped into Simon's mind. The sentinel had been musing on the differences in his life since his guide had erupted into it. Simon had commented on the kid's penchant for hanging onto Jim's shirts and sweaters. The sentinel had grinned and said wryly, “I'm going to need a whole new wardrobe if he makes it a habit.” Another sweater was being tugged out of shape and it was clearly evident that the state of his clothes was the least of Ellison's concerns. The sentinel's strong right hand was caressing his guide's back, his left around Blair's waist. Safe, and deep in the bond, the young guide was at peace. And practically asleep. Simon addressed his detective.

"Jim, I AM sorry. I don't know what happened back there. I just saw red. I...." He stopped and said sincerely, "You know I would not hurt the kid. I....." He floundered to a halt as icy blue measured him.

"But you did, Simon." The quietly spoken words had more impact than if Jim had yelled them at him. There was little comfort or forgiveness to be found in the sentinel's face. Then the sentinel's head tilted to one side and Simon knew he was listening to the only voice of reason he would follow.

"If you're sure, Chief?" Simon saw a slender hand flex on a broad shoulder.

"Blair said, "Give us this time and we will come to your office, Captain, but until then, please go."

Simon realised that he was being dismissed. For a moment he just stood there, studying them. He saw the way that Jim moved his hands more firmly over the smaller man before dropping his head to inhale the scent of his guide. "Only when you're ready, Chief, now rest." One hand went up to cradle the back of a curly head and Blair melted against Jim with all the trust that Daryl had once shared so often. Now they were so rare … he still carried the warmth of the hug Daryl had given earlier. Even more than the words, that embrace had told him they would be all right. Simon turned to go, nodding to Slater as he went out.
The commander's attention had been drawn to David. The guide was swaying slightly and Slater could see his need to be with his sentinel prime. Certainly, Jon and Karl had shown every evidence of needing their sentinels. Dan knew that David was leery of being on his own in the police station, for good reason, and offered, "I'll take you back to Sentinel Prime Edwards, if you want." David rose shakily to his feet and nodded silently. Slater saw him shiver and asked, "May I touch you?"

The guide glanced at him and then…

"Don't." Slater said it as soon as he saw the intention form but it was too late. David had folded to his knees to Slater.

Slater sighed. //The more he hung around Ellison and Sandburg the more he realized he was ruined as a conventional GDP officer.// He reached a hand down, his touch signalling David to come to his feet. The guide walked behind Slater's left shoulder, close but without touching. Not talking, a quiet shadow, the perfect guide, yet to Slater this total obedience now felt wrong.

The hands of the clock moved slowly across its face in the bonding suite. Eventually, Doctor Harvey and Lisa Pais withdrew with their guides, leaving the dark pair to their deep bond. Both pairs knew that something had happened to them in the linkage, that their relationships would never be quite the same anymore.

Much later, Jim escorted his guide into the Captain's office. Simon was reminded of the first time they had ever come into the office, not because of the similarities but because of the differences. Then the guide had been plastered to Jim's back, one hand fluttering over his sentinel's shoulders in unconscious distress and nervousness. Now he walked just behind his sentinel's shoulder with the confidence of a man who knew where he should be and what he wanted. Simon knew that he was looking at the dark guide, but not just Dark Guide. There was a trace of their Blair's humor and compassion in the dark blue eyes that met his fearlessly. Dark Blair walked half a step behind because it allowed the sentinel to protect him.

The sentinel looked around as if he had never been in Simon's office before. Satisfied that all was safe, he ushered he guide into a chair and stood behind it. He rested a hand on his guide's shoulder, his thumb slowly and gently rubbing the tense muscles, the motion calming. Blair… //Dark Blair// Simon amended… started without preamble.

"Your son, Captain, was frightened that he was going to develop into a guide. He had gotten into an argument with his mother and during the course of it she told him that her maternal mother was an empath. He found out in school today that the talent sometimes skips a generation. Given that Daryl had just learned the truth about us, he was running scared that that was to be his fate." Dark Blair's lips twisted into a smile, but it lacked the usual warmth of the young man. "Ironic isn't it, Captain, for him to fear he would become what he reviled?" He didn't wait for an answer from the shocked captain. "He asked me to run a check on him to see if he was an empath."

"And is Daryl…?" Simon could not help but jump in.

"Daryl has some slight empathy but not enough to be classed as a guide. He would be well suited to the roll of counsellor, nothing more. He is certainly safe from the GDP"

Simon felt relief wash through that his son would not have to go through what this young man in front of him had suffered and then was ashamed of his relief. Blue eyes locked on his and he knew that the empath had read him… and not only understood but forgave the relief. Simon remembered telling Blair that a father's love for his son could drive him to the wrong thing. It could also give him the courage to ask a favor of a man he had attacked scant hours before.

"Can you help him, Blair, to understand his limited abilities?"
"Blair will be happy to help." The sentinel cut in, anger coloring his voice. "He and Daryl have come to an understanding. Just leave it at that." Ellison wouldn't hurt Daryl to get back at Daryl's father but he wasn't happy with his captain. A slender hand reached up and circled his wrist and he made an effort to calm down.

"Blair." Simon knew he had to do this. "I am so sorry. I don't know what got in to me. I trust you. It was just that when I saw Daryl, I ...".

The guide reached a hand out and caught Simon's wrist, pulling him close so that he could look straight into his eyes. "I understand, Captain. The paternal instinct is one of the strongest things we have and you grew up in a culture that restricts touch to family or lover. I am neither to your son. It is all right, sir. I do understand. You categorised my touching your son as our culture predisposed you. Touch each other not… unless you are family or lovers or…” Blair grinned faintly…”on a sports field. Man is not meant to live like that. He needs to connect with his fellow man on many levels. A pat, a hug, an arm around a shoulder, sometime can mean more than words. It's sad; we teach children about bad touch but not good touch. We've corrupted our instinctive need for touch and we all pay a price for it. Empaths just pay a higher price than most.” Blair blushed as he realized he had been lecturing the captain. “Sorry, sir, that's the anthropologist talking.”

“The anthropologist makes sense, son.” The captain smiled at the anthropologist/guide's discomfiture. Only to show some discomfort of his own. Simon fidgeted, something he was *not* used to doing. Ellison almost smiled and Simon clearly detected a grin on the bruised face of the guide. Bruises he had put there. “I… I don't know what to say, Blair.”

“Don't say, Captain. Feel… and touch.”

A slender hand reached for his arm with those words and Blair began to channel Simon's emotions. The Captain's eyes opened wide at the sensation and he started to pull away. Jim grabbed his wrist and held him still. "You will let him do this, sir. He needs to know what you truly feel… and so do I." Blair brought his sentinel into the link and then allowed Jim to experience the Captain's emotions. Ellison could feel the guilt and the truth behind the Captain's words of sorrow. Only then did the sentinel accept that the assault had been a misguided error. For his part, Simon felt the fierce protective nature of the sentinel coursing through him and the equally protective but compassionate nature of the guide. Blair slowly released his hold on the Captain and turned his empathy fully onto his sentinel. The Captain saw the look of contentment on the big man's face as he gently stroked his guide's long hair. The Guide's eyes closed and his head rested on Ellison's hip. Jim looked at Simon as the Captain spoke from the heart. "I realise that I was privileged. I do understand now, Jim. My mother believed that some people have a pure soul. She tried to convince me of that but I knew better. I was wrong about that too. He has one, Jim." He put a hand out and gently stroked the curled head. "I am sorry." Blair didn't move. It was left to Ellison to answer.

"He knows, Simon. He felt it; emotions don't lie. I'm taking him home, Simon. He needs to rest. What he just did takes a lot out of him." It was stated in a straightforward way. Simon could take it or leave it; the Sentinel didn't care. Simon nodded. “Get him home, Jim. Come back when you're *both* ready.” He watched as Jim coaxed his sleepy guide to his feet and guided him out the door, supporting his wavering steps with a strong arm.
The Goodman surveillance was a killer; Jim had been running the case for the last week, and so far there had been no breaks, Goodman was staying put; no visitors, no phone calls. The man was living the life of a hermit, but Jim was convinced that Goodman was going to get the itch again very soon, and then he would be out looking for a new victim.

Blair, like any guide, was out to look after his sentinel whether he wanted to be looked after or not. Jim sometimes became so focused on his work that he did not eat properly; only consuming candy bars and sugar-rush laced coffee.

The coins dropped into the vending machine with a clunk, and for a moment Blair's fingers hesitated over the button, in the end deciding on the triple-decker chicken salad. Calories were not important; the only thing that mattered was getting food into his sentinel.

He turned and then froze in place. Standing in front of him were three GDP officers, two male and one female, all young, and eager. Blair forced himself to calm, he was in the PD and they couldn't harm him.

"Kneel, guide, and show your respect," the taller of the two men ordered.

Blair felt his knee bend as the fear reflex tried to cut in, but he refused to let it overtake him. He lifted his head higher and looked them straight in the eye. "No Sir".

The taller GDP Officer's voice showed his disbelief; "You spoke back Guide," he reached for the leash at this waist.

There was no way that they were going to leash him, not here and not now.

Before it could get out of control. Guard Gibb came in. He took in the scene with one look, and tried to defuse it.

"Senior Guide Prime," The voice was a pleasant, low rumble.

"Commander Slater asked if you would attend the meeting in his office, SIR he apologizes for the short notice. Senior Sentinel Prime Ellison is already there and waiting on you". He stood back. "After you, Mr Sandburg."

Blair chanced a glance at the three young officers and nearly laughed; the look on their face was priceless. One of them finally stuttered "You called a *GUIDE SIR*! You allowed the guide to go first, protocol dictates that you…"

"Mr Sandburg is the Senior Guide Prime of Cascade" Gibb stated it as if it was the simplest thing in the world, then to Blair, " Mr Sandburg, the Commander is waiting for you.

Blair nodded, not trusting himself to speak. He had dipped his barriers to get a reading of Gibb, and
was puzzled. This was no joke; the man meant exactly what he was saying.

In the lift up to the GDP offices, Guard Gibb, stood between Blair and the rookie officers, his attention fixed on the small guide. When the doors opened, he stepped back to allow him to proceed first, leaving the puzzled rookies to trail after them.

Kathy Holland, Slater's secretary, waved them straight through, “Commander Slater is waiting for you, and please go straight through.”

Blair's confusion deepened. Kathy Holland usually ignored him as if he was a piece of the furniture, and here she was not only talking to him, but god that was actually a smile. He was beginning to think he knew how Dorothy felt in OZ, especially when Commander Slater got up as he entered and put his hand out. For a long moment Blair just stared at him. He had forgotten how long it had been since someone had offered him that basic courtesy. He accepted the handshake, and then he knew he was in OZ when Slater added “Please be seated, we are just waiting on Sentinel Prime Edwards”.

Almost on cue, Edwards arrived with David next to him. When David started to kneel Slater's "No" was sharp enough to stop him. Edwards reacted to it by pulling David back.

"Please take a seat Sentinel Prime Edwards, Guide Prime Sutherland. Sentinel Prime Harvey sends her regrets but as she is on the Osgood case, I will fill her in later".

Blair chanced a look at the three GDP rookies and could see their clearly shocked faces. //Join the club//.

David's hand was making small strokes against his sentinel's arm, showing his nerves. He at least felt more relaxed now about showing his needs without being hurt verbally and, on several occasions, physically by people who took objection to him. He could still remember clearly his sentinel's reaction when he had been taken to the hospital after one "accident". Edwards had nearly thrown the man through the wall when he had said, "There's no need for pretence, sentinel, you're allowed to punish your guide". Edwards, ex-Marine and SWAT officer, was the most gentle of people where his young guide was concerned. He was still embarrassed by his need to connect, not liking to admit it in public, but now that the Senior Sentinel Prime quite openly looked for comfort from his guide's presence, it had given him the leave to do the same.

Commander Slater kept his voice level, but he could see by the slight tipping of their heads that the sentinels were reading his vital signs, and both dropped a hand on their guide.

"Gentlemen, thank you for coming to this meeting. My apologies for the short notice, but there have been some changes made to the regulations and you should be aware of them".

"This memo is dated today and from the desk of Dr Claydove, Director of the GDP, and Institute of Sentinels".

"In the future all GDP officers and guards will have to produce their warrant cards and state their name, rank and office when stopping a guide. They cannot remove the guide from a location that is his place of work or home without the notification of his sentinel. The guide also has to be officially told why it is being done, and the guide has the right to contact their sentinel".

He ignored the intakes of breath as he continued. "No guide is to be leashed without a direct order from the officer in charge. A guard can no longer order a leashing regardless of the guide status."

"If leashing is done, then it can only be done by a qualified member of the GDP, and with a standard leash; all other sizes are now outlawed. In the case of rogue guides, they no longer have to by law
have a leash with them at all times. If a sentinel of a rogue guide can justify good conduct to a GDP officer of Command rank then the guide need no longer have a leash”.

He took a breath.

"If a rogue guide is taken to a hostel, he will remain in a standard hostel unless his conduct, or his sentinel, has indicated that he could turn rogue. Only then will he be sent to a correction facility, otherwise he will stay at the hostel.”

"Because he will be in an ordinary facility, the correction uniform will be worn for the first three days. If, after that time, he has been of good conduct, the guide may wear his own clothes and for any future stays, unless he falls from grace, he will be excused the correctional uniform.”

Slater looked around at the faces of the sentinels and saw their nods of approval to these changes of the basic rules. He continued.

"When working the guide will now remain standing with one hand resting on his sentinel's shoulder, the other by his side. He will remain one step behind his sentinel at all times. When a guide meets members of the GDP; he will remain standing in the indicated position. The kneeling position will remain the same and when ordered to pay respect, this is the posture ALL GUIDES will adopt. ALL GUIDES can only be ordered down to pay respect by their sentinel or by a senior officer. This includes GDP Officer Doctors”.

“Finally, when dealing with a Senior Guide or Guide Prime, if the name is not known, they are to be referred too as Sir or Madam; the correct address being Senior Guide Prime when they are first addressed and after that Mr., Miss, or Mrs. These changes are now Rules of Conduct amended Section 125 and they are now included into the GDP regulations.”

Jim's hand hovered Blair's wrist; he could feel his pulse pounding, and his touch was calming his guide down.

Slate was coming to the end of his statement.

"Finally,” he turned to Guard Gibb and took an envelope from him. "Documentation, and ID card changes have been made. Senior Guide Prime Blair Sandburg, this is your new ID card. As you can see, it is clearly marked with your Sentinel rank, and your ID badge is so marked." Guard Gibb handed it across as Slater then turned and said, “Guide Prime David…”

Blair tuned out the Commander and looked at the ID card and the badge as Jim leaned down to look at it. It bore Blair's picture, with the guide bars across the corner, but under it were the words SENIOR GUIDE PRIME BLAIR JACOB SANDBURG, then under that in smaller type Senior Sentinel Prime James Ellison. No longer was Jim's name the only one on it.

He opened the folded cardboard wallet, and his breath came in a sharp intake; this was an official Police observer ID card. No mention was made of his guide rank on it, just his picture, name and details of the department. He had never dreamed that a GDP officer would give him something like that.

Slater smiled. “And finally, this memo has been given to the Sentinel - Guide and GDP training facilities.”

Jim was thoughtful. The traditionalists would not like this one bit, and although the rules had changed, this was no quick fix. They might play lip-service to the new regs, but, he knew that the rank and file of the GDP would be slow to bring them into being, and that Blair would be in just as much danger as ever before. The Old GDP would fight this tooth and nail, and the fact that the
guides where still property of their sentinels hadn't changed. They where still virtually slaves, the only difference effecting the Guide Primes; giving them some measure of authority. He was selfish in that he saw it helped Blair and that made him happy. Maybe this was the tip of the iceberg; that old song kept running through his head "times are a changing". Perhaps they were.

Commander Slater turned his attention to the three rookies, “Lady and Gentlemen, thank you for coming. Today is the first day of your probation at the Cascade Police Department Liaison Office, and for some of you it might be your last. The Cascade Police Department has the distinction of being the headquarters of the Senior Sentinel Prime of Cascade, James Ellison and three Sentinel Primes, among them Sentinel Prime Edwards”.

The three young GDP officers found themselves the soul center of attention of one Senior Sentinel Prime and one Sentinel Prime. Blue and brown eyes focused on them and they seemed to see down to their very souls. They had been trained to work with sentinels, but they seemed to realize that nothing had come close to preparing them for this moment.

“If you pass their inspection and that of their guides, you will then be on probation here and subject to weekly reviews. Now Senior Sentinel Prime Ellison, would you like to start”.

For the three rookies it was going to be a long day.

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The Institute of Sentinel Studies

The news about the change in the regulations had been the talking point of the day and not everyone, was greeting the news with the same joy, as the Guides and Sentinels of Cascade PD. The traditionalists were angry, they saw it as chipping away at the power of the GDP, and the appointment of a rogue guide, as Senior Guide Prime was a slap in the face to them all. The GDP Guides had already taken it up with their Director, they had worked within the system and dedicated themselves to policing and helping hunt down any rogue or corrupt guides. Sandburg was rubbing their noses in it. The fact he was bonded to the Senior Sentinel Prime was an obstacle but not one that could not be over come. Already three of them had volunteered to take the place of Blair Sandburg, if the Director ordered the bond broken. Believing that they had training to give the Senior Sentinel Prime the support he deserved. There was always a great risk involved in severing a bond, the guides heart had to be stopped to simulate death, and then the sentinel in state of distress had to be coaxed into claiming a new guide. But too their horror, the Director had turned down all of their pleas, and the resentment had grown. The GDP guides had all qualified in the top 2 percent of their class at the institute, and had bonded with GDP Sentinel Officers and Senior Guards, in return they had a privileged life style which gave them the freedom the ordinary guides could only hope for. Now that life of privilege was under attack. The traditionalists had found some allies among the Brotherhood of Blue, and soon Blair Sandburg would see the light, or perish in the attempt.

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Blair Sandburg bounced up the stairs to the loft; he was in too good a mood to wait for the lift. He had an ID card in his back pocket that told the public and The Sentinel World that He, Blair Sandburg was a Senior Guide Prime. And the new rules meant that he had to be treated with some respect. A rogue guide, correction fodder, and they had to treat him with respect now! Even the exhaustion of having to keep Jim calm during the selection of the rookies, couldn't slow him down.

One of them had opened his mouth, and sent Jim into Blessed Protector mode, and in retrospect, had been lucky to walk way. But Slater had gotten his answer. One went away, and two got the green light to start their probation.
He dropped his keys into the basket near the door of the loft, laid his paperwork on the table, and looked round him. He didn't feel hungry, but a cup of tea might help. Blair opened the cupboard and took out the red caddy and gave it a shake, a smile touched his lips, Jim didn't drink the tea himself, but always knew when he was running out, and took the time to refill the caddy for him. The simple pleasure of making tea, a chore most people took for granted, but for him a small sign of his independence, that he could eat and drink when he wanted too without the fear of blow or a leashing. He loaded up his tray, a mug, a small teapot with a wolf on the side, a thick wedge of bread, cheese and pickles and then balancing it, he took a seat at the coffee table. Jim has said he was going to be late home, police business. So he had a quiet few hours to work on the Dig paperwork before his sentinel came home.

Putting the tray down carefully, he reached into his backpack and tugged his diary and journal out. For a moment he just savoured the touch and smell of the new leather diary. It had been one of the first things he had brought with *his* money. There was a note inside: Digging team meet 3.30 pm. He glanced at his watch. He could still make it, and be back before 8.30 pm, when Jim would be back from work. Blair picked up his backpack, scooped the papers off the table, and headed out.

11.00 p.m

The sentinel stood on the balcony of the loft, looking out across the city. Through the other traffic noises he picked up the sound of Blair's car, the rattle of the exhaust, and the out-of-tune engine that was as clear to sentinel hearing as a signature.

Voices drifted easily up to him. "Shit Alan, who the hell would do that to the whole of the dig team. We get the Prof home safe and then we can see to Chris and Mick.

"Now, according to the Prof's wallet his must be on the top floor, we get him up there and knock on the door".

"No man, he's got a sentinel up there, you know, *human pit bull*. Have you seen the guy? I say we put him in the lift, hit the button and run. Nothing can happen to him between the lift and the front door”.

"Sounds like a good idea, okay Prof we're here".

Jim moved towards his front door and waited for the arrival of his wayward guide.

Blair came out of the lift and swayed down the hallway to the apartment. He thrust a hand in his pocket, and staggered sideways with the force of it. His shoulder hit the wall and he bounced off it with a giggle. Then he began to tug his keys out, bringing the pocket with them. Looking down, he tried to free them, his head resting against the door to the loft, when it opened. Slowly he straightened up, a soppy grin on his face. “Hi Man, you would not believe the meeting, and that fruit juice… wow”. His voice trailed off as he stumbled into the loft, nearly taking a header into his sentinel.

Jim Ellison stopped him with a hand to his chest; he was clearly not amused. “Why the long face big guy, you look like …” Blair swayed and caught at Jim's jacket to steady himself. With his free hand he patted Jim's chest, “not a happy sentinel tonight”. “Blair will fix it, Blair can always fix it”. His voice grew softer and softer.

"Where have you been Sandburg?” The anger was plain in Jim's voice, fuelled by the heavy wave of alcohol that came off his guide's breath every time he spoke, and to round it off the kid looked as if
he was about to drop asleep on his feet, before he had gone his answers.

"There was a meeting of the excavation team. I forgot about it. I had to attend..."

“So you couldn't phone? And what kind of academic meeting ends up with you getting half drunk? Or do all archaeological briefings end up in the pub?”

Blair seemed to pull himself up, his good humor disappearing in that second. He gave Jim a hard poke in the chest with his finger "You just wait up, Ellison".

//Ellison?// Jim was puzzled. His guide never end-named him. It was as if he needed to use Jim's first name to reassure himself that he was safe.

"I am not your personal property! I do have a life", the dark guide had come through and was snarling back at him. "What is it, sentinel? You think I should kneel down to you … Sentinel?" He said the title as an insult.

Jim noticed the unnatural flush to his guide's face, the tremors that were running through his body, his heartbeat hammering through his rib cage. When he pushed past the alcohol there was a sharp tang of chemical. Blair had been slipped a spiked drink; the sentinel had seen the unmistakable Dark Guide persona come through. Somehow he had to calm him down, before he got into trouble.

"I do what I want. You don't dictate to me ever, Sentinel. If I wanted, I could zone you like this". Blair spat the words at him, the loathing rolled off his tongue.

When the younger man pushed away from Jim, he stumbled, almost falling backward. The sentinel caught his arm, only to have it thrown off.

"Your all the Fucking same! You want something from me. What is it tonight Ellison? You want me to hold your hand or your dick?"

Jim was totally stunned by the bile that was coming from his guide. The drink had released Blair's demons and they had all come to the surface.

"At least Wilson was up front with what he wanted. What do you want Sentinel, huh? When's the bubble going to burst, Ellison? When are you going to turn into a bastard? This some sort of sick game you're playing with my life?" He gave the Jim another hard shove. "Enjoying the joke? I heard the cops at the station: the little freak, the hippy punk, why don't Jim put him in his place? He killed a cop! So when's it going to happen, Sentinel?"

Jim reached a hand out, only to have it hit out of the way again. Blair was backing away from him and Jim saw that he was about to trip over the coffee table. If he landed on that, he could seriously hurt himself if it broke. Jim's hand shot out to catch him, grabbing the front of his shirt. Blair twisted to pull free from the hold.

"Quit struggling, Sandburg, you're going to hurt yourself". Desperation easily colored the sentinel's voice; he was scared for his guide.

"Get your hands off me, Ellison". As Blair tried to bat away the hand holding him, Jim could see the panic in the younger man. Wherever Blair was, it was a scary place. He needed to feel safe to get back to the present, and at the moment he was taking refuge in the Dark Guide persona.

Jim released his grip, not wanting to frighten him any further.

Blair pushed back away from him, "I am getting out of here! You can't stop me, call the GDP if you
Levelly Jim shook his head, "You're not going anywhere tonight Sandburg".

“You going to stop me, Sentinel? Try and I'll put you down like that”, he snapped his fingers, or at least tried to. Jim filed the statement away for later reference. At the moment, he had more important things to do, like stop his wayward guide.

Jim's jaw tightened. This was going to end here. "On your knees guide".

Blair's lips twisted in a bitter snarl. His next words were physically impossible. In the past, when Blair got caught up in his demons, the ingrained responses were one way of getting through to him, but tonight all it did was fuel him further. Blair stumbled and he nearly fell into the coffee table again.

Jim's patience snapped. The kid was going to hurt himself at this rate. He caught him, to support him and help him regain his balance. Blair pushed past him, and headed for the door. Jim's eyesight zoomed in on the glint of silver in his hand, his keys. The kid was going to drive his car. Thank god his friends had driven him home. In his mind's eye he suddenly saw a flash of his guide in a twisted metal wreck.

He reached for Blair, but the moment his hand made contact, pain ripped through his head and he was forced to release his hold, his hands going to his head. For a moment he balanced on the edge of a zone out, but pulled himself back. Blair had burned him through the linkage. He shook his head to try and clear it.

Blair suddenly halted staring at the spirit guide, the Black Panther, who was pacing in front of the door, growling a low rumbling sound, its eyes blazing. "Sentinel, tell your cat to get out of the way".

Before he could answer the panther jumped. It hit Blair at chest height, knocking him backward as it jumped into him. The guide's body arched and he screamed; his knees buckling as he went down.

Jim dived forward, catching his head and shoulders before they could hit the floor.

The dark guide pulled back and Blair whispered, "I don't feel too good", and then his eyes rolled up in his head.

Blair's skin was flushed and hot under his fingertips. This eyelids flickered, and for a moment unfocused eyes fixed on him, and then he began to retch.

Half carrying, half dragging the now almost limp body, Jim got him to the bathroom. A large hand turned Blair's head, as he threw up into the bowl and began to shiver; then a damp towel cleaned his face. The sentinel turned down his sense of smell. "Chief, what is it about you and trouble? Somehow you always seem to find it".

Blair found that opening his eyes was a major feat, the light seemed too bright and burned through his very eyelids; they snapped closed. He buried his face deeper into his pillow. His headache was blinding, he could taste the bile in his mouth, nausea hit him in a wave, and the pain in his stomach made him bring his knees up to block it. He remembered in vivid clarity what had happened. He had always been cursed that way; he never had the luxury of not remembering.

“How are you feeling now Chief?” The words had been pitched softly; considerate of the hangover his guide was now suffering.

"Better, thanks".
“Then how about trying to open your eyes again?”

Blair opened them, winced and closed them again with a groan. Jim closed the distance between them, caught one of his guide’s hands and dropped two pills in it. Once they had been taken, Jim handed him a glass of fruit juice, “Drink this kid, and don’t argue”.

Getting vertical from the horizontal, would have been nearly impossible for Blair without a firm hand under his arm, even so he found that he had to cling onto Jim to avoid nose-diving into the carpet. Only when his charge had made it into the bathroom safely did Jim leave him to start breakfast.

When Blair finally emerged, he was feeling marginally more human, his headache was now down to a dull roar. He bit his lip as he saw this sentinel cooking; the smell of the flood was made his stomach flip over, but he knew that he would have to force some of it down him. Jim was in mother hen mode and only that would satisfy him that his guide wasn’t starving. But first he had something to do.

Jims smile faded as he saw his guide sink onto his knees, his head down, his hands crossed behind his back. The position, although based on the usual working guide position, was the extreme one; the kid would be very uncomfortable like that.

"Blair there's no need," He closed the distance between them, needing to get to his guide.

"I ask your forgiveness, Senior Sentinel Prime Ellison, for what I said last night, I meant no slur on you, and my punishment is in your hands".

Jim closed his eyes. The kid hadn't listened to a word he had said, or wouldn't believe that Jim wouldn't take it out on him, probably fearing that he would lose Jim's friendship.

"Blair last night your juice was spiked with alcohol and you where living out some nightmare in your head. I...”

The guide didn't appear to listen to him, “I ask your forgiveness Sentinel Prime Ellison, for what I said last night, I meant no slur, and * my * punishment is in your hands”.

"Damn,” Jim swore. “I have reviewed your crime Sandburg, and you have nothing to answer for. You were a victim”. “Now stand, and take your place by my side”. He prayed that statement would be enough for his tormented guide.

There was a long moment before Blair got to his feet again, and allowing himself to be pushed into a chair. Jim released a breath he hadn't realized he was holding. Blair kept his head down, hiding his face behind a veil of hair, making sure that Jim could see that he was a * good * guide, submissive to the will of his sentinel.

He made no effort to eat, waiting for Jim to start

"Eat your breakfast Blair,” //god I cant believe I said that I am sounding like a mother, what was it about that kid that brings that out in me? // Jim was all too aware that Blair was liable to start brooding on what had happened, so he decided to try a change of tack. "So what's the rest of the team like”?

"Nice group. They're mainly first year archaeological students, with a few post grads, and Teaching Assistants. Carol's going to be there, nice lady”.

"You can tell me about them later. Their names, and....”.

"Jim you're not", he blanched "you're not going to check them out! Tell me your not man".
"Would I do that?" The older man tried to sound innocent.

"Yes... you would"

"Too smart for your own good, kid. If one of them spiked your drink I want to know all about them".

Blair was surprised to see two letters placed near his backpack. The first one he recognized as Naomi's handwriting, and he pulled the note out, smiling as he read it. She was at a retreat to process everything that had happened, and was due back in Cascade on the 26th. She was looking forward to having dinner with them. At least she had come to an understanding with Jim, beginning to see him as a person and not the stereotypical jack-booted cop and sentinel. The only problem was that the sentinel had refused to bookmark her, making her part of his tribe. Blair got the feeling that Jim did not trust her. Somehow he had to change his mind.

The other letter was type written. Puzzled, he opened it, and his face flamed at the obscenity in it. Immediately Jim was plucking it out of his hand, his jaw tightening as he read it. He dropped a hand on Blair's shoulder. "Easy Blair". A photograph fluttered down and Jim caught it; it was of Blair last night being helped to the car. He was clearly drunk. Scrawled across the bottom, was a note about the morally corrupt, alcoholic true nature of the guide.

"I should have known that it wasn't going to all end with Tipp. I won the battle not the war. What can you see Jim?" He noticed that the sentinel was staring at the type; he put a hand out, laying it on Jim's shoulder to ground him as he worked.

"It's the same typeset. I'll take this in with me and get Caro to run it through the system, to see if they can pick anything new up from it". He then turned to the envelope. It was a standard white one, the address was typed and it was stamped but hand delivered. He should have spotted that when he picked it up.

Jim's mind was made up. He would see Carol Reeves when he dropped Blair off at the University and see about getting the names of the dig team members. The spiked drink was more that just a student prank. Someone wanted Blair to be disgraced, and that was going to stop, and stop now.

Dr Wentworth had a meeting with Blair for 11:30 to discuss the first chapter of his dissertation. So while he was out of the way, Jim decided to pay his visit to Carol Reeves. The woman was inputting data when she heard the knock on her door, and glanced up, a soft flush coloring her face.

The sentinel was actually a good-looking guy and had a killer smile. Pity he wouldn't even look at her. She was resigned to the fact that men wanted the Kim Bassinger figure and face; she was a bit too homely for them. She was told that she had a nice personality, but when had a man ever wolf-whistled at a girl for that? She shook her head to rid herself of her wandering thoughts. "Hello Detective".

"Jim." He flashed her one of his mega smiles.

"Jim." She colored deeper.

"What can you tell me about the digging team? The other night Blair's drink was spiked."

"So was half of the team's. It was an idiot called," she broke off seeing his face darken. "Er… well,
Dr Welland has taken him to task. He's been suspended. He was jealous that he had lost his place on the team to Blair and he was trying to get Dr Welland, only the doctor was caught up in his office, and his Teaching Assistant took the briefing."

Jim could tell by her heartbeat that she believed what she was saying, but he still didn't believe it. If they wanted to get back at Welland, they could have put sugar in his fuel tank; there was no end of non-lethal ways to piss someone off, but spiking drinks could have fatal results; this did not track for him.

"So who is on the team?"

"Umm… well, Dr Welland, his TA Clare Ash, me, Blair and you of course. Lawrence Child, Mark Norman, Chris Bamford, and Mick Bailey."

The sentinel sat there listening to the names. By the end of the day, he would know all about them, down to their shoe size.

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Dr Wentworth could not suppress a smile. Just listening to Blair Sandburg talk about the dig made him want to grin; there was such a spirit of adventure in the man, which thankfully hadn't been destroyed. The first chapter of his dissertation was progressing well.

“Blair any luck in getting your sentinel to come in for the testing? You do need to try and establish the bench mark of his abilities.”

“I keep trying Dr Wentworth, but Jim can be stubborn about these things.”

“You really do need him to come in Blair, we need to establish without a question of doubt that he is a Dark Sentinel, and I would like to see the tests before the Doctoral Committee meets.”

“I can't make him come for the tests, but I can try”.

“Good, now on page 132 you are outlining the affect of the…”

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When Blair came out of Hargrove Hall, he felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. The Doctor had been very positive about the first chapter. Then he saw a very harassed Mick Bailey standing by the old minibus they were taking down to the dig. The problem was a very irate sentinel who was circling the vehicle slowly, examining it minutely.

“Hi Jim! See what I mean? There's no need to drive down, we can catch a lift with Mick.”

The young man favored Blair with a scathing look, all he had done was pull up outside of the Hall then this cop form hell had descended on his Minibus and preceded to take the van apart. Sure he hadn't taken his note pad out yet, but it was only a matter of time before he booked him for at least 5 violations.

"No way Chief! That thing is a death trap and you are not travelling in it!"

Blair opened his mouth to argue and then closed it again, his words unsaid. When he was like this, the Sentinel was not going to listen to anyone. He mouthed to Mick, “Sorry man, I'll fix it.” Taking a firm hold on Jim's shoulder, he steered him away.
“Balded tires.”

“I'll see that he gets them replaced.”

“No left indicator, or head light.”

“I'll make sure they're fixed.”

Jim pulled away from the smaller man. “I don't care what he does, you're not travelling in it. We take the truck down and no argument.” The icy tone indicated that he would brook no disagreement on this. Jim went back to circling the minibus, his muttered comments not quite audible to the two students.

Mick wandered over to Blair's side. “Is he for real man?”

“Believe it Mick.”

“Dr Welland said to tell you that you could both bunk up in our tent if you like, it's big enough for four.”

“Thanks, but no thanks, we'd best bring our own. It's a sentinel thing. They have to have their own territory.”

“The Doc said that you had been with Stoddard in Peru, was that right?”

“Yeah, it got real interesting, real fast. We were trying to contact this isolationist tribe, and ran into some dead drug dealers.”

“Dead.”

“The local Sentinel took them out, we were lucky he didn't have anything against us! He left us his arrow as a calling card. Hell, when I woke and found it near my face, I nearly had a fit. The guy's name was Enqueri. A real killer they said, by all accounts; people went in and no one came out.

Jim straightened up when he heard that one word, Enqueri. It was his Chopec name and the kid was talking about him. Blair did not know. Before he could say anything, the grad student had continued. He was talking a mile a minute, but what stood out was “I left the country un-bonded.”

The sentinel shot him a look. A cold shudder ran through him at the thought of Blair being the guide to a foreign sentinel.

"I was only 16 when I joined Ranier, so I wasn't on-line then, and later I learned to block them, and I kept away from any sentinels, although there was that one in Peru that chased me three blocks before I lost him. Wow that was close."

One look at his sentinel and Blair realized Jim wasn't taking this story very well; the instinctive reaction of the Dark Sentinel to someone attempting to take his guide. Soothingly Blair said "Long time ago, Jim, a lot of water under the bridge since then." He closed the distance between them and dropped a hand on to Jim arm. "My Sentinel, Marked and Claimed"

"Marked and claimed, guide", it was a vow made between sentinel and guide at bonding, but it meant more than just words, it was a reaffirming, and acted as a balm to them.

It was the first time that Mick had seen Blair interacting with his sentinel, and suddenly he was thankful he was not sharing a tent with the older man.
On the morning they were due to leave Cascade for the dig, Blair was surprised to see Edwards waiting by the side of the truck.

"The City watch is yours, Sentinel," Jim spoke solemnly.

"Until your return. The Watch is taken". Edwards replied. The two sentinels shook hands and only then did Jim drive off.

Blair tugged his notebook out of his pocket and started to write. He glanced across at Jim's questioning look.

"Totally new territorial behaviour Jim; makes a great chapter for my diss. I have some good idea for tests for you on this. Now, I think…..".

Jim cut him off. "My own anthropologist! Every sentinel should have one," he reached hand across and gave his guide's hair a quick ruffle.

A classic blue and white truck made its way easily up the off-road track. "You sure we're on the right side road Chief?" Jim Ellison queried.

"Of course! Just because I got us lost last time, it was only a short detour."

"A mile is short, Blair that was twelve miles and heading totally in the wrong direction", he laughed, and then slowed the truck as the camp came into sight. Jim reminded himself, //this is for my guide//. Already he could hear the good-natured bantering of the students. Jim shuddered suddenly, it was as if he was going through a tunnel, the cold air pressing and rushing against his skin, then it was gone, but he could feel the hair on the back of his neck rise.

Jim parked near the old minibus, and a company sponsored Jeep. For a moment he just stood there looking round the camp site; a mixture of tents of various ages, no fixed pattern to them, and a dinner area of benches laid out near several newer tents all marked up with the STEELE CAR HIRE logo. As two of the students came into view, he recognized them from their files. Chris Bamford was the supervisor and Liz Gill. They gave a wave, which Blair answered; his guide was already bouncing on the balls of his feet. He was excited he was in his element.

Dr Welland had been standing by his tent talking to his young Teaching Assistant when the truck pulled into the camp area. The buff looking archaeologist gave a look of triumph to his assistant, and tucking the clipboard under his arm, strolled over.

"Welcome to the excavation Blair. Dr Wentworth speaks highly of you. This must be your sentinel, Detective Ellison," he smiled and put his hand out.

Jim accepted it, but his features were fixed neutrally. He would cut him some slack once he knew that he was guide safe. Correction, that's Blair safe. Since when had his life become so black and white?" Where do you want us to camp?"

Welland smiled "Anywhere you like on this side of the excavation. Get settled in and have a look at the site. I have some work to do. I am sure I will see you later. Sentinel, Guide."

Jim watched the doctors retreating back thoughtfully, "Jim?" He heard his name and felt a hand on his forearm, moving up and down, in short sharp movements.

Jim captured the hand, "Its okay Chief, I wasn't zoned, just thinking. Come on, let's put the tent up."
And just then Chris and Liz drifted up and hesitated, a little unsure of Jim. He waved his own grad student away with a gruff, "Learn the layout, Chief, I'll look after the tent."

For a moment Jim watched Blair head towards the dig, and the sentinel listened in on them. Only when he was sure that his guide was safe with the students did he turn back to the job at hand. He noted the other tents and shook his head. That would not do, they needed to be further away from them, and he gave over to the pure instinct that dictated that he must have his own territorial boundary.

Once the tent was up, he pulled the sleeping bags inside, and then rolled the bedding out. Blair’s was a new one, and expensive. It had a wool fleece lining, as his guide hated the cold and had little tolerance for it. He had never been mean with his money, and on a good day his ex-wife would be more than willing to say that, but with Blair he was more than willing to spend what he needed to keep him warm and safe. The kid asked for precious little from him, as if scared of voicing his needs.

Blair couldn't help but grin. The man was prowling around the campsite; it was such pure sentinel instinctive behaviour, straight out of Burton. He was sure that Jim didn't even realize what he was doing as he catalogued everything and everyone in the camp.

The day flew past and dinner in the evening was a relaxed affair. The students now greeted Blair warmly, but were a little reserved about Jim. He wasn’t only a sentinel; he was also a cop, and they were unsure of what exactly to say to him. They were also unsure of what his reaction would be to them speaking to Blair. They had all had basic Sentinel 101 and Sentinel 102 in High School, but it had soon became clear when Blair had attended the dig meetings that he was independent, and his sentinel allowed him his own life. It did not fit in what they had been taught, so it made them uneasy.

Jim pointedly settled down to eat his meal and left them to their chatter to reinforce the point that, as far as he was concerned, Blair was a free agent. Soon the students were involved in an ethical argument as to whether a newly discovered timber circle on the coast should be removed to be conserved or whether it should be left to the gradual decay of the ages. Jim was pleased; Blair was right in the middle of the cut and thrust of the argument that soon descended in an archaeological bull session. Blair was well read, and eloquent in his arguments, beating aside their points as they were put forward. This was *his Blair*, not the abused creature in the cell. This confident, vibrant, hyperactive, intelligent student was his guide and his friend.

While the talk went on, Jim subjected each to a keen examination, matching their faces to the files that he had pulled up on them. The first one was Mick Bailey, the assistant supervisor of the digging team. He was less than six feet, his haircut so short it was nearly a skinhead cut, and he had two rings in his ear, and was smoking a cigarette. Then came Chris Bamford. He was the other supervisor. He sensed the tension between the two of them; Chris Bamford was the same height and build, with a ring through his lip and multiple rings through his ears. He was older and seemed more confident in his talk. Next came Liz Gill, a talk buxom girl with ginger hair twisted up into an untidy knot on the top of her head. Peter Shore was small and laid back, but his heart peaked when he heard that Jim was a cop. He tightened his senses around the man and detected the soft odor of Red Blaze; the drug wasn’t stale so the kid had been smoking it recently.

Blair hissed under his breath that Peter Shore was a last minute replacement for one of the girls whose parents had taken ill. Jim fixed him with a look, and the students gave a shudder. Jim didn’t like surprises where his guide’s safety was concerned. Then came the illustrator and planner, Clive West. He was the oldest of the students. Time flew past, and soon the camp was breaking up for the night. In the dark, Blair lay there, listening to the sounds of the camp going to sleep for the night. He rolled onto his side and pulled the sleeping bag around him; although the weather was warm, at night the temperature dropped, and he could already feel a chill in the air, but he was warm and snug and
that was all that mattered.

Blair exhaled slowly, savouring the nip in the air. He was back. This was what he had dreamed about with Alex and later in the GDP cells, his life back on line, a job, and a PhD to work towards. He smiled, as he added *and a sentinel* but not just any sentinel but one that was also his friend.

Jim was just dropping to sleep when he heard the cry of a panther, echoed by a wolf howling into the night. He had the feeling it was trying to tell him something, and that it wasn't good news; his blessed protector instinct went to full alert.

**Day two**

Blair fitted in well, being an old hand at archaeological digs. He was soon in synch with the other diggers and was allocated his own trench. The doctor had set a couple of trial trenches over the most promising features. So far they had only found some civil war artefacts, but nothing more ancient. As Blair was carefully working on some pottery shards, he sensed his sentinel and looked up. This was what he had feared that Jim would get bored; the man just was not use to sitting around. He needed something to keep him occupied. He didn't think that Jim would pull him off the dig, and take him home because he had gotten fed up and bored. But he could not expect him to stare into space for 14 days.

Carol saw the Sentinel and Guide together and came across. “Hi Blair, Jim”, look I know it's a bit of a pain, but do you think you could take a look at some of the pottery shards we found in trench two. I think there's a pattern maybe an inscription but I can't see it, may Jim?” She gave a pleading look towards the sentinel.

“Come on Jim take a look man, help a friend”. Blair put in.

The sentinel suddenly broke out in a laugh, as he saw the puppy dog eyes that Carol was turning on him.

“Okay, lead the way”, the amusement stilled as he added “you need me you call Chief”. Only when he was sure Blair got the message did he follow Carol over to the finds processing tent.

Much to his was surprised Jim found that he was actually enjoying himself. With a feather-light touch, he could read some of the worn away patterns on the shards. Then, from the corner of his eye he saw a dark shadow. He tracked it and saw that it was a panther. All through the day, Jim kept glimpsing the large cat. It never stayed long enough for him to see it clearly, but he could hear its growls, a warning for him to be on his guard. But against what, against whom?

Finally when they had turned in for the night he brought up the subject. “Blair, this sentinel business, what do you know about it?”

Blair cracked open his eyes, and fixed him with a level gaze. “Big field, can you cut it down a bit?”

“Spirit Guides.”

His young guide's face lit up. “What, have you seen it here, Jim?” He noted the embarrassed look on his sentinel’s face. “Come on man, it's me you're talking to.”

“The Black Panther, it's circling the camp, I've been seeing it all day.”

“Wow, that well just wow.”

“Can't you be more constructive Chief? That isn't exactly helping me.”
“Sorry, big guy.” Blair thought for a moment. “We have met it before and it's not malevolent, so it's appearance must be warning of some sort.”

“You're the guide, can't you interpret what it wants?”

“Jim, I'm a guide, not a shaman. Sorry. Unless it leaves a message, preferably in English, I'm as lost as you are. All I can say is that a spirit guide would not appear unless it was serious.”

Nothing Blair said eased the apprehension that the sentinel was feeling. If anything, all it did was confirm his gut feeling that there was something very wrong at the dig. Reaching up he switched the lamp off and rolled over in his sleeping bag, his back to his guide. Without seeing, he knew that Blair was sliding down in his own sleeping bag; heard the soft rush of the zipper and a few yawns and then the beloved heart beat began to slow, the breathing evening out, and Blair was asleep.

Lying there, the sentinel sent out his senses, creating a sensor web around the site. For a moment it touched on the panther, and the creature's deep growl echoed in his head before the panther started its patrol of the camp again.

Day Three
The day had started like any other. Jim was co-opted again to work in the artefact sorting. It was not that he minded it, but his mood became sourer when he noticed the panther lurking in the background. He had grumbled over breakfast and a few of the more nervous students had looked worried. They'd had no real contact with sentinels and this one they knew, on the most basic level, frightened them.

Mick leaned into Carol, “Blair, is he okay with that guy?” Then he moved even closer “I just joined the GLA and you should hear what they tell us about sentinels.”

Carol snorted, “Don't believe all the crap your read. Just know that Ellison would die to protect Blair, and if you start spouting that GLA stuff around him you'd best be ready to run, hard and fast.

“He looks mean.”

“Mick believe me he's a pussy cat,” Carol grinned going back to her work and leaving a confused Mick looking at her.

Later that afternoon, Blair was making his way up one of the sharply sloping planks from the lower dig to one of the ones higher up when the sound of the plank creaking nearly deafened his sentinel. Jim's eyesight locked onto the sound his ears had identified and he saw the wood bending and splitting. He only had time to yell Blair's name, then, with a crack it broke, sending Blair and another student falling.

The trench at that point was thick with rocks, and Jim found Blair kneeling by Clive West, murmuring, “Lay still man, Jim's a medic, he's going to help you.”

Dr. Welland hurried up. "Did he damage any of the dig?"

Blair's face showed his disgust, "Clive's hurt and all you care about it the dig? Get real man."

Neither guide nor sentinel saw the look on the doctor's face, but Carol Reeves did. Something was not right. She turned to get the first aid kit.

The sentinel climbed down, and knelt by the side of the injured man. As he began to check out the
injury, Blair's hand rested on his shoulder helping to keep him focused.

He could see that the blood was causing Jim some problems.

"He's got two breaks in the lower leg. We're going to have to stabilize the leg to lift him out of here".

Carol knelt on the edge of the trench, "Blair", she said, and she handed the first aid kit down. Jim gave her a nod of thanks and returned to his patient.

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Welland went to his tent, and switched on the white noise generator, and then hit the speed dial on his phone. "I'll need a replacement for West now. Send Kyle Singleton. I know he's an un-bonded sentinel. No, I don't think that's going to be a problem. I am sure that Guide Sandburg had everything under control. He severed the connection and then dialled again. "Just to let you know that we're on schedule. The sentinel replacement will be arriving tomorrow. Just remember your side of the bargain."

Welland clicked the phone off. He didn't know what game *they* were playing, but as long as he got the find of the decade, he didn't care what they did.

Once Clive was stabilized, Jim turned his attention to Blair. There was a three-inch cut to his leg under the knee. "Okay, Chief, your turn next."

"I am all right Jim." Blair's argument died away, as he saw the look on his sentinel's face. Resigned to being treated, he held his hand out, and allowed his sentinel to park him on one of the dinner benches with a sterile pack held against the wound while Jim and the students helped get Clive out of the trench and to the Jeep.

Only when the student was on his way down, driven by Dr Welland, did Jim return to his guide. He took the pack from Blair's hand, and then checked the wound, his fingers probing the injury.

"What happened Chief?"

"The plank just gave way. Clive gave me a push, so I landed on the spoil heap and not the rocks. Ouch!" Blair took in a short quick breath as pain knifed through his leg.

"Stop moving Chief, I need to get this clean." Only when the sentinel was satisfied did he bandage the injury. "Don't worry, the wound's more messy than serious. It doesn't need stitches the butterfly will hold it."

The evening was subdued. No one was feeling up to shooting the breeze, so they turned in early, hoping for better things the next day.

Day Four
Kyle Singleton's car was making its way up the track. He immediately went to Dr Welland's tent to check in with the archaeologist on arrival. Their talk was short, and when he reappeared, he stood for a moment looking around the campsite, as if looking for something or someone.

Jim's head suddenly came around as the new student walked into the main camp area. In five long strides, Jim had caught hold of Blair as the younger man stood inking up the planning board, and pulled him behind him, as he faced the newcomer.

Blair put a hand out, catching his partner's shirt, and then with a pat to the back he stroked his shoulder, trying to calm him down. "Easy Jim. Talk to me, big guy". He noticed the way his sentinel
"He's an un-bonded sentinel," the aggression thrummed through the link between them. Jim went to Blessed Protector 2nd Alert.

"Calm down man, he's not challenging you." Mentally, Blair added, //if he did, he must have a death wish//.

The student headed towards them. Bad move. Blair snapped, "Keep back! Don't come any closer."

"What's wrong? I was only going to say hello."

"You're an un-bonded, that's the problem."

The student shrugged. "Yeah but you don't have to kneel to me, Guide." It was said with a condescending tone. Blair's hand began to move faster as he fought to keep his sentinel on an even keel.

"Wouldn't have to any way", Blair snapped and then added, "This is not good. Look…"

Jim had seen the look of distaste on the un-bonded sentinel's face when Blair had spoken back to him, and it fuelled his anger further. He cut him off. "Stay away from my guide. He's mine, Marked and Claimed. If you challenge, we will do it now."

"Jim, man," Blair gave Jim a hard shake. "He's not challenging you. He's just an un-bonded sentinel who's on our dig. It's simple; not sentinel things, just a student thing. This is a guy you could kill with one hand behind your back, okay?" But he could see that Jim was not buying it, the sentinel needed more. He slid around, then put himself between the two sentinels, his hands moving to guide his sentinel's head down to look at him, one hand each side of his face. There was steel in the guide's voice. "You will look at me, and you will listen to me. This man is no threat." The low growling coming from the sentinel was slowly dying down.

He felt the tension gradually fade from his sentinel's body. "Now let's try this again." He recognized the student as Kyle Singleton. He was a TA belonging to Dr Higgins.

"Kyle Singleton, this is the Senior Sentinel Prime of Cascade."

"Chief," he heard the warning in Jim's voice, and ignored it.

"Detective Jim Ellison," Blair then continued, "Jim, this Kyle Singleton."

The student put his hand out, but Blair shook his head. Jim had calmed, but he wasn't ready yet for hand-to-hand contact.

Dr Welland paused by the side of his tent and grinned, it was working better than he had ever imagined.

Carol came up and glanced at each of the three men in turn. Time to get the sentinel and guide away from the newcomer. She was well aware that Kyle was a sentinel, and from the little she knew, that did not sound very good. She could almost sense the tension in the air. "Blair, Jim, let me show you the secondary dig area, it's higher up, we currently have three trenches in, number two is showing the most promise at the moment. Blair?" There was almost a plea in her tone.

“Sure Carol, come on Jim.” Blair re-enforced it with a tug on his arm.
Jim trailed behind them. His guide was absorbing Carol's information like a sponge. He could get the edited version off Blair tonight.

As he stood by his guide listening to Carol talking about the layers, he caught the looks of a couple of the girls aimed in his direction. "Liz he's kinda cute for a older guy, and what a body, just like the Energizer bunny, bet he could keep going all night. Bet he's got a killer smile."

The other girl cut in quickly "Liz, he's a sentinel, can hear a pin fall at two blocks."

"Shit, you don't think…"  

Jim turned his mega watt smile on her, and she blushed scarlet. It was flattering, but they were too young for him. But he couldn't help but grin as he saw the way his guide was reacting to them. He was now helping Carol on trench two, she was sure that he could detect the changing colour of the earth layers and reluctantly with some prompting from Blair he had agreed to try and help. Jim has given his guide a look of total disgust when he had heard the “make sure you record it” comment. Blair had somehow managed to look totally innocent when he added, “I know you can hear me man. Remember, I need data for my diss”. 

Alone Blair settled down to working on his own trench, with Welland opening new trenches up, in a bid to find something before the deadline, the student diggers where stretched pretty thin.

Kyle Singleton look round carefully, he had gone back to his tent to get a baseball cap, he pushed his blond hair out of his eyes as he tugged it on, then his eyes lit on Blair Sandburg. The grad student was carefully removing a shard of pottery from the side of the trench; his attention was completely fixed on it, and nothing else

Kyle head tilted to one side, and he openly scented the guide in front of him, his tongue flicked over his lips, as he tasted the guide. This was what he wanted, he moved without realizing it, his shadow announcing his arrival before he spoke. "Blair can I talk to you?" He was amazed how level his voice was. The hunger inside of him to claim the guide was bubbling to the surface.

"Go ahead but I have to keep working."

"You're a guide right?" Stupid thing to say, but it meant that he could get closer to Blair. The man did not seem to have noticed it yet. Good.

"Right." Blair all but rolled his eyes. He wondered where this was going to go; Kyle already knew the answer to that one.

The young sentinel inched a little closer. “Look I'm going to need a training guide, and since you're at the university, why don't we get together? You can give me some pointers.”

Blair looked up. "Man, you have a death wish don't you? Haven't you learned anything at the Institute? I am the Senior Guide Prime; I don't do training, live with it. Sorry I can't help you.”

The need began to take on a life of its own. //How dare a guide deny me what he had been bred to give. Hell, I am being considerate, even talking to one of them as if they where a citizen, a norm, and all I get is this crap.// With a start Singleton realized that Blair was still talking.

“And in case you don't remember he's Senior Sentinel Prime James Ellison. I am his guide claimed and Marked. I serve only my sentinel and no other," he repeated his vow clearly and levelly, so there could be no mistake. The un-bonded sentinel had to know that.

Kyle grabbed his arm tightly. "Guides have to serve sentinels. I choose you, so forget that Guide
Prime crap. You're nothing, guide, so get on your knees. Better still, on your belly to your betters.” The scent rolling off the guide was intoxicating and he had to have him. //How dare he refuse him? His father was a Captain in the GDP and he said that the changes were cosmetic only. No one took the rules seriously. It was a good PR spin that was all.//

Blair twisted around, and lashed out with the trowel he was holding. Kyle gave a cry of pain, blood coming from a gash to his hand.

With a snarl, Kyle went feral, his fist struck out, Blair's lip split and the blow put the young guide down. Kyle did not give him chance to recover, he was on top of him, trying to catch his face in his hands, but Blair was struggling too violently. Kyle released him long enough to hit him again. Stunned and nearly out cold, Blair lost his hold and Kyle tried to start to imprint him.

Carol had been pointing to the layers when Jim Ellison had suddenly sworn and powered out of the trench, racing back toward Blair.

Jim caught hold of Kyle by the back of his shirt, and threw him off his guide, spinning to place himself between his guide and the interloper. He did not need a weapon; he was going to take this sentinel out with his bare hands. At the moment, none of Jim Ellison, the man, was left. All that was present was the Warrior Dark Sentinel, and that screamed for him to kill the man.

"Jim, chill, man!" Blair rolled quickly to his feet. He had to defuse this before someone, correction, before Kyle, died.

"He was trying to claim you. That is a challenge. The words had been almost purred; Jim was at his most deadly. The dark sentinel and the covert black ops warrior were coming together to meet the challenge for possession of his guide. The quiet words had more power than any yelled in anger.

"No! Jim, NO! He's young, he's untrained, and he's an idiot. You are the Alpha Sentinel here." He tried to defuse the situation, that's what guides did best; stop the sentinels from killing each other.

But, hell, Jim wasn't buying it; his whole attention was fixed on the interloper. This could end in a world of pain, but it was the only way.

Blair hit Jim across the back of the head, his voice dropping into guide tone. “Leave him.”

Jim twisted as fast as a snake and caught Blair by the scruff of the t-shirt, Thrusting him down onto his knees. His eyes fixed on Blair's face.

“Kyle get hell out of here if you want to keep breathing,” Blair ordered the younger sentinel away. “Don't be a bigger asshole get out of here now.”

At no time did Blair break eye contact; the power rippled through the link. Blair gasped at the intensity of the emotion, and then Jim moved his hand and his thumb brushed the bristle on his jaw and the large hand now held his throat, each hair like a spike against his sentinel's fingers. For a moment Jim lost himself in his guide.

The sensory net that he had thrown around them rippled, and the dark sentinel knew that the other had now gone. "Blair, my tent NOW". He ordered,

"Jim I have..." The hand tightened on his throat.

"NOW," it was the deep-throated roar of the dark sentinel. Jim dragged his guide to their tent and threw him inside, pausing only to look around and check for any threats. Carol had started forward, only to fall back beneath the look on Jim Ellison's face; the man was barely human.
Dr Welland hurried up. "Do we have a problem?" He demanded of Carol Reeves. Welland was worried; he needed to know what was happening.

Carol took a step away from the dig leader. The man made her skin crawl, there was just something about him. "No, not if Kyle wants to keep breathing. He tried to claim Blair Sandburg and Jim didn't take too kindly to it."

The young sentinel was white as a ghost, and visibly shaking. "Mr. Singleton?" Welland demanded of him.

“I never meant. It was... I can't explain it,” Kyle was fighting to put into words what he had felt and there was no excuse for what he had tried to do to Guide Sandburg. He had broken every rule in the sentinel book. “I am sorry, sir.” He looked towards the growing group of students as if it was some sort of freak show. His anger was directed towards one of them. //She told me that the guide was easy, would go with anyone. How could she have been that wrong?/

Blair landed heavily and rolled back onto his knees. His heart told him that Jim would not hurt him, but at times like this all he could remember was the time the dark sentinel had taken Alex Barnes over. In the dark persona, she had hospitalized him more than once, and Jim could do a lot more damage.

“So, guide, you would look for another Sentinel? You think he could protect you?”

“No, Claimed and Marked sentinel, only to you.”

“Then prove your bonding. You will remain in the tent for the rest of the day, you will not move from your sleeping bag unless I am with you. You are mine, claimed and marked. My guide, in my territory.”

Blair flushed red as he tugged his hiking boots off. At no time did he rise above his seated sentinel's shoulder. He had to be submissive; the dark sentinel was still in control. Blair quickly did as he was told, sliding onto the sleeping bag. The dark sentinel needed to know that his guide could be protected and kept secure from any that would try to take what was his.

A quick look at his watch told him it was still early and now he was stuck here for the rest of the day while Jim was in the dark sentinel mode; he would not allow him to move. From the chronicles of the ancients, he had learned that submission was a tool that even the fiery Dark Guide used to pacify his sentinel. The sentinel was the warrior, the strength of the partnership, the guide the heart and wisdom. Sometimes, in appearing to lose, the guide won.

Sentinels were creatures of their emotions, feral and primitive. They needed to be Alpha to their Beta Guide, but the power was in the hands of the guide, which was the truth that Blair was more and more sure the GDP had tried to hide. So, with a soft yawn he settled down to wait it out. He curled up on the sleeping bag and went to sleep. His sentinel sat blocking the tent flap, on guard, his senses turned up high to track the movements around the camp.

The young woman was roughly turned, as Kyle hissed, “He refused to be my training guide. You said... you promised he would roll over for me!”

"Did you offer money?" The girl's voice was scathing.
"No."

The other student laughed, "He went with that Barnes psycho and then with Ellison. He would go with you if you offered enough. He's a rogue guide. Remember what I told you? You saw the picture of him at the University. If he sold it for money at the facility, you think he would turn down some easy money working as a training guide?"

"I..."

"Trust me, offer money and he will be falling all over himself to kneel for you," her laugh was nasty. "Dr Welland wants me to finish mapping trench 4. See you at dinner." There was a loud pop in his ears as she switched the white noise generator off.

Kyle watched her go and shook his head slowly, a nice girl but... she had a side to her that he hadn't seen before; he had thought that she liked Blair.

One o'clock.

Blair was bored, his book was just near his head, all he had to do was reach for it, his fingers had just brushed the copy when Jim came back.

The Dark Sentinel had taken to patrolling the area around the camp and now he was back, carrying a plate of food. With heartfelt relief he realized it was Jim Ellison that was back in charge. He looked almost sheepish. “Blair, look I am sorry, I didn't mean to…” he trailed off and pointed toward Blair's throat.

Puzzled the younger man pulled out a shaving mirror from his toilet bag, and then twisted it to catch his image; the air came out of his lungs with a sharp hiss. Black bruising had started to form on his throat.

“I though he was going to take my head off then…” Blair trailed off as he caught the look on his sentinel's face. “Jim, I don't think of you having done this, it was the dark sentinel, and even he would not have hurt me.”

"I could have broken your neck."

“But you didn't, you kept control, big guy. You would never hurt me.”

“But I have.”

Blair rolled his eyes up in despair, “Come on, Jim. It wasn't you, you had amnesia, and it was the dark sentinel in control, and considering you could have broken me with one hand behind your back, you stopped yourself from Doing any major harm.”

Jim did guilt so well; Blair knew that he was in for a major spoiling when he got home. It made him wonder about Jim's family life, that he thought that forgiveness could only be won by money spent. But from the little he knew, William Ellison had used money as a way of punishing and rewarding his boys. Maybe that's why Jim was so entrenched in his beliefs.

Kyle kept away from the other students. It was humiliating. He had quickly learned that the guide TA was popular among the diggers and he was being blamed for Sandburg's incarceration for the day.
By three o'clock Blair was beyond bored. He could hear the camp activities and wanted to be out there involved, not a lapdog to his sentinel. He knew that wasn't fair. Jim never treated him like a lapdog, but at this moment, he knew that Jim wasn't about to let him go anytime soon.

He spent the time mentally reviewing his notes. Something was pushing Jim towards this most primitive of behavior patterns, and his guess was that it was connected in some way to the temple. First the zone outs on the pictures, on something that only he could see. What if it was not on the picture as such, but in the brain, a hard wire reaction? Blair mused. Then, coming to the dig would have reinforced it.

**Seven o'clock**

One very pressing need was pushing against Blair's bladder and made him plead, "come on, man, you have to let me go or its going to get really messy here, understand?" Reluctantly, he was released, and quickly he pulled his shoes on and rushed to the latrine.

He was returning at a much slower speed when he saw Kyle Singleton heading towards him. //Damn idiot *does* have a death wish. //

He ignored Kyle and kept walking, his eyes on the ground, no eye contact. He knew without looking that Jim was watching him from the front of the tent, and through the late afternoon he had managed to channel Jim, but if that idiot spoke to him, he would put Jim right back into dark sentinel overdrive.

"Blair." Anger flared. //How dare a guide ignore me? Jumped up little prick// Kyle's hand lashed out and caught Blair by the arm, pulling him around. "Damn it, you speak to me when I address you, and you go to your knees."

"Get your hands off me, un-bonded,” it came out as the snarl of the dark guide, and his aggression burned through the link, caused by the touch, even though it was just surface. Kyle released his hold, and staggered back. For a moment, he balanced on the edge of a zone out. The young un-bonded sentinel's hands went to his head, and the guide was gone. Jim had started forward, but Blair caught him by the arm. The sentinel had grabbed hold of his shoulder to move him out of the way when his guide was suddenly in front of him, both hands pushing him back. "You will come with me," Jim ignored him, and carried on walking forward. Blair's hand flashed around with a resounding slap, and his sentinel's head snapped sideways with the force of the blow. There was nothing half-hearted in this blow, the one earlier had been edged with Blair's nerves. This one was pure Dark Guide.

**NOW. NOW SENTINEL. HE IS NOTHING BUT DUST UNDER YOUR FEET. I NEED TO BOND AND WE WILL! NOW.**

Dark Sentinel and Dark Guide looked at each other. The sentinel raised a hand and rubbed his face. He was about to break free when he felt the blaze through the link, the power of it meeting his aggression head on. The smaller dark guide winning, his grip changed, and he shepherded his sentinel into the tent. Then pulled him down, his need over riding any protocol.

Dr Welland turned back to his laptop, plugged it into the cell phone, and logged onto the Internet, collecting his email. He grinned as he saw the email address of his GDP contact and the attached email file BJS. He loaded it into the memory of his laptop, and then disconnected from the link and then sat down to read the file.

His plan was working. All he needed was to continue the pressure and he would get the result he wanted. He looked up as the flap on his work tent open, then closed and was tied shut. He looked at
the young female student, his TA, Clare, as she crossed over and kissed him on the mouth. Claire gave a deep throated, sexy little groan as his hand went up the front of her loose fitting top, and rubbed softly. "No bra."

"Don't need one, unlike that old trout of a wife of yours." She captured his mouth with hers.

After the kiss he asked "Well?"

"I primed Kyle, told him to try money, and he couldn't wait to go for that little freak again; like a cat to catnip."

"He might get hurt. Does that bother you, you use to date Singleton?"

"No," Claire shook her head, "He's a good lay, and knows a few things, but..." she straddled his lap, and pulled her top off over her head, "but Kyle's not in your league lover. Tell me again, how much they're going to pay us for this..."

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**Day 5**

Blair woke at the crack of dawn and yawned. He felt more tired after being kept on house arrest than if he had been digging. The first thing he realized was that Jim was missing. He sat guarding the entrance to the tent, and when he looked it was the dark sentinel that looked back at him.

The shirt that lay on his backpack was Jim's. It was the one he had worn yesterday. Blair got the message, he was to wear Jim's shirt. He already had Jim's hat, marking him to the other sentinel as Jim's property, and Jim's alone.

He started to collect his toilet bag, only to have it thrown over to the other side of the tent. "Okay Jim, so you don't want me to wash," //Of course, Jim's scent was all over him from the bonding, he wants to make sure that Kyle can not miss the signs: MINE KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF! // "Okay, Jim, I can do this."

Only then did Jim move and escort his guide to breakfast, keeping him on the inside, away from the other students. He took a seat blocking their view of his guide.

Peter Shore came up with his plate. "Hi, Blair, did you..." his voice trailed off as he caught the laser sharp glare from the sentinel. The voice was a warning growl, "Fresher Gold & Red Blaze. Dump it before I bust you."

"I... er... Look man I don't have..."

Dr Welland cut in, “Pete, Detective Ellison is a sentinel remember?”

"I smoked it before we left on the dig! I don't have any, honest."

Jim's head tilted and then he felt the tug on the back of his mind as a smaller hand touched his shoulder, and calming vibes washed through him.

For Peter it was too much, and he hurried back to the tent he shared with three of the other male diggers. He scooped up the small packet and disappeared into the latrine, tossing it down the hole.

None of the students would meet the gaze of the sentinel. Carol was the only one that ignored it, knowing that she had nothing to fear from the older man. After all, they both had the same thing in mind, to protect one Blair Jacob Sandburg.
Jim's gaze settled on Claire Ash and his jaw tightened. She stank of passion and the base line scent of her lover. For a moment he had to think, then he realized it was Dr Welland's scent. It was not illegal; she was of age, but the ethics where plain; a professor didn't date a student. But, he was not the moral police force. As long as Welland didn't involve Blair in his little games, Jim would live and let live.

Ranier University:
Dean Hammond put a hand to her hair and gave it a pat. She took a quick glance around her office. She was a career academic and had made Ranier her life. She smoothed her charcoal business suit and checked that there was fresh coffee on the hot plate and that the best china cups had replaced the usual mugs. Everything was in place, including the model of the new wing. This man was too important to keep waiting. It was known that he didn't travel much out of his usual circle, so his arrival at Ranier University might have good things in store for them.

She got up and shook hands with Mr. William Ellison, and Mr. Stephen Ellison.

William Ellison smiled. It was a nice, easy smile and made him look years younger. "Thank you for seeing me so quickly. Let me introduce my youngest son, Stephen."

The Dean shook hands. "And how can I help you gentlemen?"

"I have heard that you currently have a guide studying at Ranier."

"Er… yes. Blair Sandburg. He is a bonded guide. He's away at the moment, off campus and when he's returned, his tenure will be over. The PhD committee meets in 8 days time."

"My son is the Senior Sentinel Prime of Cascade, Detective James Ellison." William said it with pride, though in his heart was a touch of sadness. He had once called his son a freak and made him suppress his abilities. Now he saw him for the man he was and he was proud of him. His son was a decorated military hero, a decorated police officer and Senior Sentinel Prime of the city. "His guide is Guide Blair Sandburg."

"Oh Hell, // Hammond thought with a sinking heart. This didn't sound good.

"He is Jim's property, his guide, and he wants him at Ranier. I do not take kindly to people trying to take away what belongs to my son."

"But…” The dean spluttered.

"It is Jim's pleasure that Blair is here. Blair is intelligent and insightful. What Jim wants is what I want". His tone of voice changed to one of silken danger. "Blair Sandburg is one of the most compassionate people I have ever met, and I would *hate* to see his career damaged by narrow minded people. I am sure that you would agree, as you have only to look at Blair's exam marks and his grants to show that he is good at his job and an ideal candidate for his Ph.D."

The dean could feel the beads of sweat on her face. William Ellison had not raised his voice or screamed at her, but she had felt the steel behind his simple words. "I could only agree with you on that."

"Good. I am glad we are on the same wavelength. Blair spoke highly of your anthropology department, and of Dr Wentworth. He mentioned a project that he is interested in.”

Dean Hammond took a deep breath. "Of course, it is not a f orgone conclusion that he will loose his
PhD candidature."

"I believe in certainties."

"Well I am *certain* that the PhD committee will see what an asset he can be to the University."

"I am pleased you see it my way, Dean." William Ellison looked her straight in the eye. "Blair Sandburg is important to me. I would not like to hear that he has experienced any difficulties, such as having his student loans reactivated, which would cause him distress."

Dean Hammond made a note on her pad. "I am sure that would not happen."

"Good. Now, Blair was saying only the other day in MY OFFICE that you needed a new computer suite for the Anthropology department…"

Stephen Ellison settled back it was always good to see a master at work, whether using the carrot or the whip.

Day 6
The first pieces of pottery were crude wear, and helped to date the site. Dr. Welland was getting nervous, he was all too aware of the make-or-break nature of this site. He needed a big find to consolidate his tenure at Ranier University, and this sentinel temple would be the one to make his name. He was convinced that was what he had here, the first temple outside of Peru, but so far all he had found were some foundations of homes and fortifications, nothing to indicate the temple's location. In another five weeks time, the developers would be able to move in and take over the area.

He had attempted to unofficially recruit the local tree huggers to stop the development by taking the developers to court over the desecration of the trees, but the Grace Company were old hands. They would cut only enough trees to make the holiday retreat, *for the tired-of-soul*, and other New Age claptrap. The town was backing the development, as it replaced jobs lost when the mill closed down. All they had to do was stall the development to give him time to prove his theory, and that's why the sentinel and guide were important.

He reflected on the data file. According to his source in the GDP, he could trigger hardwired responses, and, just like a butterfly homing to a forest he had never seen, at a certain time and place, if he could trigger Ellison, they could find something to rival the finding of the KV5 tombs in Egypt.

But it was taking too long. His source had told him that there needed to be a very real threat to the guide to trigger the reaction.

Blair sat on the edge of the trench, and looked at the pottery piece in his hand. It was a better quality piece of pottery than the others. He ran a finger over it; it was raised.

"Mind if I look, Chief?" The warmth was back in the voice. Jim had bonded with him before the start of work and the mellowing of his tone was a dead give away to anyone with knowledge of Sentinels. His senses would be set to the baseline. Blair looked at him critically. Just under the baseline, by the look of it. He knew his sentinel and that look.

"Sure, be careful."

Jim's fingers where hypersensitive, and his face took on a look of deep concentration, then he gave a
quick intake of breath as he was pulled back from the zone by the touch of his guide.

"Jim, god man you had me worried there for a moment."

Jim smiled and his hand gave Blair's shoulder a squeeze. His look and his touch gave Blair a warm feeling. His sentinel trusted him and that was something that he didn't ever want to lose.

"This has the same pattern I saw in Peru. It's a guide vessel."

"It's a what?" Blair was almost pulling it from Jim's hands. "How… what did you see?"

"It's a bit of pot, Chief, nothing more." The older man was almost dismissive of it, not seeing it's importance.

"What? Man, it could be important. No one has ever found a guide vessel before." Blair tried to keep calm. "Tell me about Peru, Jim."

The sentinel looked down at the pot piece he was still holding, his fingertips stroking the whirl patterns. Jim's voice became distant. "Incacha was my guide then. He was the Shaman of the tribe, but he said that I would find my own guide, in my tribe. There was no stigma on being a guide in the Sky mountain people. In fact, Incacha was revered for his ability to help a sentinel. At one of the tribal councils, I met a native sentinel." Jim's voice faltered as the memories that he had repressed came back. "They don't treat their guides like slaves. The guide is the equal, and he is honored for the role he plays. This… Blair, this isn't the way it should be…"

"You do make a difference to me..." Blair reached his hand out and laid it on his sentinel's arm. The smile that was exchanged between them was the envy of Kyle Singleton as he watched them at a distance. //Not a soiled guide like this one, of course. // William Steel had told him all about Blair Sandburg and had showed him the photographs. His would be a pristine, clean living guide. He stepped back, dropping his gaze as he met Jim's; for a fleeting moment the older man's eyes had burned into him.

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**Day 7**

It was very early morning when Jim woke up. His dream had been one of loss and discovery. His guide had been stolen from him and hurt by another clan, by a man obsessed with owning him. The man could not see that a guide could only have one sentinel, one mate.

Jim threw his senses over the guide. He could detect the slight tremble of cold where a t-shirted shoulder had come uncovered, so it was perfectly natural for him to reach across and pull the sleeping bag up. He smiled as he saw the sleepy younger man snuggle down into the warmth. Only then did he turn over in his own sleeping bag and settle back to sleep, his senses telling him that his guide was safe and warm. But he could not push away the feeling that something was building. All he could do was protect Blair from whatever it was, or die trying.

For the sentinel life was that black and white now.

0-0-0-0-0-0-0

Outside the tent the spirit panther walked the boundaries of the camp, the wolf padding next to him, pausing only to sniff and root around in the dirt, both of them on guard. They paused outside the tent of the un-bonded sentinel and bristled, a threat known and marked.
Day 8
The next couple of days seemed to run smoothly for once. Kyle kept his distance and Blair was able to concentrate on his archaeology. In his trenches he had found some more pieces of the guide vessel. Welland seemed keen to play down its importance. Jim had willingly taken a series of pictures of them for his personal records. That had proved lucky because the pieces had vanished overnight.

Day 10
Blair was starting to get more and more concerned about his sentinel. Jim's behavior was changing slowly. He was becoming more and more possessive; from the moment he got up, Jim was by his side. Now he would sit next to his trench, watching him at work. He had now given up on any pretence of helping Carol. Blair could feel the tingling that showed the sentinel had his active senses wrapping around him. The need to bond was becoming overpowering. Every morning, every dinner break and every night, Jim would haul him to the tent to bond.

The dark sentinel was flexing his muscles, it knew what it wanted and that was the guide. The emotions in the bond were becoming harder to calm. Each day, the emotions became stronger, darker and more primitive, the sentinel claiming his mate, his guide.

Dr Welland had called a site briefing for 2.00 p.m. It was important and Blair wanted to attend. He straightened up in the trench, pushed his hair back from his eyes, and squinted up at Jim, then froze. He could easily identify the body language. Jim was scenting the air and, as he turned towards Dr Welland, his sentinel tensed. Then, suddenly, Blair was dragged over the lip of the trench and frogmarched to the their tent, to be thrown down onto the sleeping bags.

Blair got to his knees. “Not this time man. I have to go to that meeting. Welland's going to be well pissed if I miss it.”

“You stay here.”

“NO way Jim. This is university business, its not sentinel business, so get out of the way.” Blair swore. His sentinel was blocking the only way out. It did not look as if he was moving any time soon.

A glance at his watch told him that the meeting was about to start. This would be another black mark against his name and he could not afford many of those.

“Jim, I promise I will go to the meeting, hell you can escort me, and then we can bond.” Blair dropped his voice to the guide tone. Jim moved so fast that he did not register it until a hand caught a large fistful of his hair and pulled him close. The dark blue eyes were almost black; the need to bond was thrumming through the large man like a tuning fork. Blair had caught Jim's wrist to try and break his hold when the sentinel's emotions tore into his mind. His mouth opened and he screamed silently. He was being pushed back into a black void. Blair fought to gain control of the emotions before he became lost in them. Then his back hit the sleeping bag, and his sentinel was moving over him, the need to bond and be one with his guide blanking out all other thought.

Blair breathed deeply; drawing on all the meditation techniques he had ever learned as he began to carefully push back against the weight in his mind. At first it was a like a snowball in a furnace, he was blasted back; the pain in his head was increasing like a migraine, getting worse by the moment. Scared, he pushed back even harder, then harder again, flooding his sentinel with a feeling of calm and serenity. Finally he felt the larger man relax against him, the arm pinning him relaxed, and he let his head drop down onto the sleeping bag, in the grip of a migraine. With a groan Blair closed his eyes again and found himself being collected into strong arms, his head tucked under his sentinel's
chin, as the man rolled him so that he lay on his human pillow. Strong hands ran down his body from head to hip. Through the migraine, he muttered, "Yours, Jim, only yours, claimed and marked." His hands weakly fluttered against Jim's chest.

He had no choice but to allow his sentinel to fuss over him. He tried to bring his academic mind to bear on the problem. Jim's whole behavior had changed slowly from the first day they had arrived. No, that wasn't correct, it was since Kyle had made his presence known. The fact that an un-bonded sentinel was in such close proximity was causing some sort of territorial reaction with Jim. Dr Welland had to either remove Kyle, and so, remove the threat, or allow them to withdraw from the dig before something happened.

Talking to the doctor was going to be the hard part. His sentinel would not allow him to walk around the camp alone and, to him, unprotected, and that idiot Kyle had done nothing to help.

He was sure that Jim was heading to some sort of climax, and he did not want any innocent people around when Jim blew.

With a start he realized that Jim was talking to him. He focused his mind on the man's words. Under them he could almost feel the nerves jingling like a wire pulled too tightly.

"Blair, did I hurt you? I don't know what happened, I…"

"Jim! It's alright man, I'll fix it." Using the link, Blair managed to calm the flash points of anxiety and bring Jim back to a more balanced state, but a small voice whispered: for how long?

Slowly Blair eased up from his human pillow. Regardless of what Jim thought, he still had a job to do, but a hand caught his hair and pulled him back down. "Okay, Man, you don't want me to go yet." He settled back down again, and sank into the bond, the link this time was more peaceful.

When he saw Blair finally come out of the tent, Dr Welland knew that now was the time to push them over the edge. Time was now a constant enemy. His colleagues had been sure the isolation and the un-bonded sentinel in close proximity to the ruins would work, but it was not working quickly enough for the archaeologist. The guide and sentinel would be gone in four days.

So it had to be now. Welland carefully palmed the spray as he saw the guide heading for the jeep with the cell phone in it. He forced a smile. "How's it going Blair?"

The young guide turned and headed towards him, his voice solemn, "Jim's not happy about Kyle. Could you get him to leave the dig until Jim's gone?"

"Not really, he's the archaeological illustrator."

"Then I will have to take Jim off the dig. He's reacting badly to something."

"No, Guide Sandburg, you will not remove the sentinel from the dig." Welland let menace enter his voice.

"Doctor, where Jim is concerned, I am in charge, not you." Blair wasn't going to allow himself to be bullied, not when Jim's well-being was at stake.

"No, Guide," Welland made the word an insult, "listen closely. You remove him from this dig, and I will personally see that your TA status is pulled when you return to Ranier. You committed to 14 days on the dig. You pull out and leave me short handed and I will make sure that Doctor
Wentworth regrets ever having you back."

"My duty to my sentinel comes first."

"Really, Blair Sandburg? You're a rogue guide, morally corrupt, do you think the parents of your students are actually going to care about your side of any story when they see the pictures?" Welland could see he was hitting home. "They say the one on your knees with your mouth around…"

“Shut up Welland, before I…”

“Before you what Guide? I have the backing of Anthony Steele. He owns the Truth Seeker paper, and you know; it's the one at all the supermarket cash points. I am sure he can make sure they run a nice story on you, complete with censored pictures. Wouldn't want to upset the nice normal people would we? So, be a good little guide and look after your sentinel, and at the end of the dig, I might just tell you where you can find the pictures and the negatives.”

Blair's eyes flamed. "You bastard, I will not risk my sentinel's health for your games no matter what you do." But his voice shook.

“‘My friends have copies ready to post, one to each of your PhD committee members, and of course Dean Hammond. Wonder what she will think?’ His face was smug when he saw the look on Blair's face. Shock, horror and yes, despair.

Dr. Welland, sneered. "I always thought it was wrong to have you at Ranier. Guides are too emotionally weak.”

Blair gathered himself together. If he was going to lose his place at Ranier, so be it, but Jim came first. "I have a BA and an MA, which is more than this group has put together. I am not going to be used, WE are not going to be used, and we're pulling out now."

Welland couldn't believe that a guide was standing up to him. His friends had said that Blair would crumble. As Blair turned, Welland used the spray. The young guide didn't hear it, he was too angry. He was just thankful that Jim had not heard the man. His footsteps quickened. Jim was monitoring him all the time now, so why hadn't he done his Terminator impression?

Blair pushed open the tent flap, and his heart sank. Jim was zoned out, he body like a statue. He had reached out to make the connection when Jim's eyes snapped open. This was not Jim, this was the Dark Sentinel and one look at his face and Blair knew he was totally pissed off. His eyes were flashing, and the emotions that came off him were wild and feral.

With a growl the sentinel lunged at him. Blair managed to fall back out of the tent, kicking the pole and collapsing into on the feral sentinel. Pure flight cut in, and Blair took to his heels into the trees.

Blair crashed through the woods. He had no plan, he was just running wild, trying to get as much distance between him and his sentinel and the people in the camp as possible. The Panther-Sentinel was closing the distance between him and his guide in long measure strides. His guide was running in panic, he would try to loop around and come back to the camp. He knew it sure as if he had just broadcast it. The sentinel started to move parallel to his guide, so that when he turned it would be into him. His heartbeat seemed to soar above the noise of the forest sounds.

Blair finally had to slow, and stood there taking in shaking breaths. //Sure, running wasn't logical, but he had to get Jim away from the civilians. His control was eroding by the moment, the need to bond
was getting deeper, and the bonding was becoming rougher. He had to get him away from them. Like this, he would tear apart anyone who got in his way.

He gave a scream as his feet suddenly went out from under him, and he slipped down a hole in the hillside. He landed heavily, rolled to a halt, and looked up at the hidden lip of the side. Then he realized it was stone. As he eased himself to his feet, pain sliced through his ankle. He pushed it to one side and limped heavily to the wall, running his hands over it. There was carving on it, a passageway. The passageway went in two directions. Okay, think this through. You have fallen through a roof, you can't get out, so... "JIM!" For good, for bad he needed his sentinel's help.

How long he was down there, he did not know, but when the voice came it was low and almost a growl. “Guide," Blair spun around. Jim was right behind him.

"Geeze man, don't do that!"

Blair pulled back from Jim. This wasn't his sentinel. Okay, it looked like him, but this wasn't him. His teeth were pulled back in a snarl and he was stalking him. He had never looked so dangerous. Sure, Jim Ellison could be a scary person, but it had never been aimed at him. This had his name on it. "Jim." Try to link him to the present. "Hey Man you found me. Sorry about the cross country run but..."

Blair looked at the oncoming sentinel and backed up fast. His foot caught a piece of stonework and he fell backwards, his head and shoulders hitting the wall with a sickening thud.

Dr Welland was trying to calm the students down. "Nothing to worry about. It's purely a sentinel-guide thing. They just need time to work it out."

Mick, one of the older diggers, shook his head. "I like Blair. He's okay. Jim could do some serious damage to him. I think we should go look for him."

"No. We could do more damage that way. I think it is best to just let them sort it out themselves. Believe me, no harm will come to them."

He waved them back to their work.

Clare came up to him. "It's working then? What do we do next?"

"If our friend in the GDP is correct, then this will have triggered the behavior we want and they should find the temple for us. If not, then we have a problem. Did you manage to bug Blair?"

"Sure. His sentinel didn't see me as a threat. You should be able to pick him up, but won't his sentinel hear it?" Clare put in.

"No it's pure organic. This is going to work." Welland added, "it's got to work." He needed the money. Without it, he could never get out from under his wife's shadow so he could marry Clare.

Blair lifted his head from the stone floor. For a moment he had thought his sentinel was going to kill him. He had never seen such rage in the man's face as he had torn the shirt off his back. Then Blair had blacked out.

When he woke he was laying on his stomach, his head resting on the feet of a stone statue of a large
cat. His hands were tightly around a metal ring.

His body flinched at a touch to the middle of his back, and then he heard the deep-throated purr. He managed to twist his head around to see the spirit panther as it was carefully scenting his body. It gave a far from pleased growl.

"You as well. Come on, chew through the rope or do something constructive."

A large paw thumped into his back, and he felt the claws flex like pin pricks against his flesh. "That a hint or something?"

He shivered with the cold, and looked towards the only source of light, a small fire burning in the middle of the chamber. His view was suddenly obscured as his wolf spirit guide took the opportunity to give his face a quick lick, then curled up against his side, its large, furry head resting against his back.

Then, a weight dropped against his lower back, and a heavy head rested on the small of his back; the panther rested against him. The warmth from the spirit guides' bodies helped to take some of the chill from his bones. He tried the bonds again and could not move them. There was no sign of his sentinel.

Blair was woken by the sound of footfalls approaching the chamber. For a moment his heart rose in his throat, then he relaxed marginally when he recognized his own sentinel. "Jim, come on, man. Let me go okay?"

"My guide, claimed and marked." It was said in a neutral voice, unlike that of his friend.

"Sure, Claimed and Marked, big guy."

His eyes met those of Jim Ellison, correction, of the Dark Sentinel, and there was an arch of almost static electricity between them. The lid on the box in Blair's mind came spinning off and the dark guide was back. Blair Sandburg was now taking a back seat.

"Release me, Sentinel, NOW." The sentinel seem to sway, not sure what to do. He didn't want to risk losing his guide again, but that tone was one of command, one that he had to obey.

"You ran from me." He sounded truculent, and while the very tone of it would have made the normal Blair frightened, it only spurred the Dark Guide on.

"You were out of control, sentinel. You will not touch me when you are out of control. You will not maul me. This is my creed, you know this already, Sentinel, yet you still try it. I am not a chew toy for you! You will treat me with the respect of my calling."

"A guide does not run from his sentinel." He would not budge from that viewpoint.

Dark Blair's eyes flashed. His sentinel needed proof and he would give it to him. "Release me, and I will prove my devotion to this bond," the dark guide intoned gravely.

Jim knelt and cut through the ropes, moving back to allow Blair to pull himself up into a cross-legged sitting position. The Dark Guide knew what was needed. Into the dust in front of him he drew two lines vertical and then one diagonally, joining the two, then quills were added. He looked up from the pattern on the floor to meet his sentinel's eyes.

Jim's eyes widened "You would do this?"
“I would prove my bond, yes.”

Jim put his knife into the fire to sterilize the blade, then and only then, he moved around to his guide and, waited until he had reached a meditative balance. Only then did he cut into the smooth flesh of Blair's chest above the heart; the blood ran in small rivulets.

Blair's breathing increased as he tried to push away the pain, fighting to keep the spiritual balance, this was important. This was no mutilation, this was a link in the chain towards the meshing, a physical badge to show a permanent link between guide and sentinel. He exhaled and the breath caught in his throat to be released with a shudder.

Hands shaking slightly, he put a hand out for the knife as Jim bared his forearm, and Blair carved the same cut into his arm. "Marked, Sentinel."

"Marked, guide." Jim's tone matched that of his dark guide.

It was late morning when Jim woke. For a moment he couldn't understand where he was and what he was doing, it was all a mystery to him. Then he saw the ropes around the statue of the panther and he smelled the blood on the knife. It was Blair's. What had he done? Guilt began to crash around him. He looked around and only relaxed marginally when he saw Blair seated cross-legged by the fire. The expression on his face was the one Jim easily recognized as his processing expression. His guide would only acknowledge him when he was ready. All he could do was sit and wait until Blair was centered and ready to talk.

Blair stretched his arms above his head. “Morning, Jim.”

"Blair. Did I hurt you?" Jim closed the distance between them, reaching out, needing the physical touch. His hands started to fly over his guide. He hesitated when he came to the shoulder wound, and he carefully peeled the square back. Blair saw him shy back.

"Easy, Jim. You have to clue me in to what you're thinking here. I might be an empathy, but I am not psychic."

There was pure angst in Jim's voice when he said, "God, Blair, I've marked you as if you're my property! I..."

Blair caught his sentinel's face and made him meet his eye. "You didn't do this Jim, WE did it. The Dark Guide he needed to make sure that I bore the mark. A bite or a wound can heal, this is marking me for life as your guide, showing my place by your side."

"Chief."

"No, listen to me Jim. It's there for a reason the Dark Guide needs it. Just go with the flow here, big guy, okay?"

Jim nodded slowly, having to meet the level gaze of his guide.

"Good. What the hell happened? One minute I was digging and the next you were after me."

"Scent."

Blair quickly looked up and swore. Jim had dropped into a zone. "No way, man, you come back now!" His voice and touch did its magic and Jim came out of the zone, immediately collecting his guide into a rib-stressing hug.
Jim looked towards the destroyed shirt and his lips pulled back showing his teeth and a low, deep-throated growl came from him.

"Tell me what it is, Jim."

"Scent mark on this is un-bonded sentinel, and linkage scent, call him to claim."

"Jim, I am claimed and marked. Go through the scent and follow my voice."

It had not taken them long to isolate the scent onto Blair's back. The scent didn't belong to Singleton it didn't have his base scent. Jim swore. "This is pure linkage scent. You're bonded; you would not be leaking it. Someone sent you up Blair."

"But why."

"We will find out who did this," his tone didn't promise who ever they where a painless future.

He gave his guide his shirt. "Your scent, your guide. You know, big guy, keep on like this and people will talk," Blair grinned at the familiar clip to the back of the head, feather light. It barely ruffled his curls.

The anthropologist cut in and Blair began to explore the temple. The chamber they were in appeared to be one of several, this one being the primary one. The passageways were made up of large interlocking stones. No mortar was used to fix them and the ceiling of the primary chamber was roofed by a square vault and strengthened by a buttress in each corner. The technical artistry of the masonry was outstanding. The height of the ceiling was at least 18 feet high with the stones gradually getting smaller as the roof stretched upwards. The passageway appeared to be coiled around like a Catherine wheel, and a large cut stone which was wedged across it, possibly a standing stone that had fallen over the centuries, sealed off the main entrance. All the walls were etched with carved patterns and text. The entrance was particularly fine; the stone there had been selected for its deep color and texture. The passageways had stone slab paving. They had fallen through a section of the roof that had collapsed over one of the lesser rooms.

The anthropologist's excitement was growing. This was the major find that Welland was looking for. He began to check the walls for the carved text, running his hands over the surface.

"I can read it." Jim said with disbelief.

"What, Jim?" Blair had not heard him; he had been lost in the find.

"I can read it," Jim answered in a level tone, "the words just leap out at me. It tells the story of the temple and this is the antechamber to the purification area."

"Keep talking."

"Its the guide's temple Blair, this was where the sentinels came to find their guides, only it's the guides that choose the sentinels, not other way around. Then, after the rite, they moved into the chamber and..." He trailed off, then caught his guide's wrist and with a tug pulled him along the stone corridor. The torch he carried lit the way. The second chamber was much larger, the ceiling rising up. In the middle was a pool of clear water with stone steps leading down. "Here they would purify themselves before the claiming ceremony, before the elders and the members of the temple."

Blair was bouncing; his tiredness was forgotten. "This is the find of the century, the guides' temple."

"That's why it can never be allowed to be released to the public," the voice behind them made them
turn quickly. Dr Welland stood there with Clare, and two men that they hadn’t seen before. The speaker was one of the newcomers.

"Man this is the biggest find! It makes..."

"Shut up, guide," He made a threatening gesture at the younger man. Dr. Welland was already drinking in the sight. He could already see himself addressing the Smithsonian Institute.

The smaller of the two men, each were dressed in military style clothing, commented, "You did a good job doctor. You were right, an instinct driven sentinel would be hardwired to find this place, all we had to do was get the guide in the right state for it to work."

Jim tugged Blair behind him, "GDP, right?"

"Right, Sentinel."

"You ran us like rats through a maze. So what are your plans for it and us now?"

"This whole place is going to go up. C4 will do it, and it will cave it, and you two... well, we can't have any witness can we?"

Welland cut in "No way, you never said anything about killing."

"What do you expect us to say? Forget all about it? Sorry, Doctor, the only reason you're walking out of here is that you're in so deep that if you ever blow the whistle on us, you're finished. But then, he did say no loose ends." The man's hand turned to Welland and there was the crack of a gun. Welland's face showed his utter shock and his hands clawed at the widening stain of blood, his body collapsing to the floor.

The shadow of the panther suddenly threw itself over the scene. The man turned, it was human nature. That was all the sentinel needed. The panther persona burned in his soul, and he leapt. The scream he made was enough to chill the blood in the veins, and that slowed them down even further. By then, it was too late. Blair threw himself at the second man. Clare hesitated a fraction of a second, then turned and ran, only to find herself blocked by Carol and the diggers holding an array of weapons. Carol had pulled the group together when she had seen the two newcomers arrive at the campsite, then leave with Clare and Dr Welland.

To her surprise, it had been Kyle Singleton who had stepped forward. “I think that Carol is right.” He flushed bright red. “Okay, I am the first to admit that I… well, I wanted Blair as my training guide. But there is something very wrong here. Those two guys, I recognise one of them. He's a GDP guard.”

Carol cut in “If there is a sentinel problem, maybe Dr Welland called them.”

“You don't get it Carol. That guy, he's not a medic; he's a guard at the correction facility. They would have sent paramedics. Also,” he almost stuttered. “Blair smelt of linkage scent.” He looked down at the ground. “Sure Blair has some of that on him, he had to, to link with Sentinel Ellison, but it's so strong it's as if he's in the heat of bonding.”

“What would that do to Ellison?” Mick asked, though he had a good idea.

“He might think that Blair wanted to bond again, and there is no way that Blair would be in that condition. He's a bonded guide. It was so strong it was like it had been thrown over him.”

Carol headed towards Welland's tent and began to go through his things.
Mick came back from trying the cell phone in the Jeep. “It's broken. Someone put it out of commission.”

Carol held the spray up and handed it to Kyle. “Well, is that it?”

He took a quick sniff and pulled back. “Pure linkage. But why?”

“Personally, I don't care about that now. All I care about it getting to Jim and Blair before something bad happens. Could you track Blair? Track this scent?”

“I think so.”

“Chris, you start back down and call the cops. We're going to need some back up here, and Kyle and I will go after them.”

She was surprised, but at the same time pleased when Mick and the others joined them, carrying a crude assortment of homemade weapons.

Kyle moved with a single-minded purpose. Then, he paused, seeming unsure of himself, and then Clare came stumbling out from behind some bushes.

Mick, pushed her out of the way. “This way”. And then he and the others rushed in.

Blair was struggling with the second man for the gun. It had taken the GDP man by surprise that a guide would actually attack him, and he had gotten in some hard blows. When the man was caught from behind, the blow to the base of the skull was a deathblow and the limp body sank to the floor.

The Sentinel stood over the bodies of the men. When he looked at Blair it was the panther sentinel that was looking at him.

"Jim, its okay you can come back now, its safe, the threat is gone."

Jim gave a large shudder and then looked down, and dismissed the men. There had been no half measures in his actions, he had gone out to kill them and remove the threat and he had done just that.

"You all right Chief?"

"Sure. Tell you one thing, Jim. Archaeology was never like this before I met you." There was a slight tremor to his voice.

Jim picked up the weapons. "Come on in, Carol and the rest of you.”

"How did you?" Carol asked. She was sure that the sentinel hadn't seen them.

"I could smell you."

"Jim." Blair hit his shoulder and the older man had the grace to look embarrassed.

"Sorry. I didn't quiet mean it like that. How did you get here?"

"We followed Clare and Welland." She paled slightly as she saw the bullet wound in the archaeologist's chest. "Is he…?"

"Dead." Jim's voice was level. He had no sympathy for the man who had manipulated his guide and had turned the GDP on them.

"Clare?" Blair asked.
“One of the boys went after her. She wouldn't have gone far.”

Carol looked around herself, for the first time seeing the temple. “This is what it was all about.”

“The Temple of the Guides, Carol. They couldn't let it get out and they were prepared to kill to
prevent it.”

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The police had arrived by the time they had made it back to the campsite. After Jim had identified
himself as a police officer, their whole attitude had changed. Finally, all the statements had been
taken and Jim watched his guide yawn and stretch and then his body sag as the events of the last
couple of days caught up with him.

The sentinel hadn't bothered to tell them that Blair was his guide and none of the diggers had said
differently. As far as he was concerned, that was none of their business, but he noticed the looks that
they gave Blair. They viewed the student's clothes in a less than complimentary manner. Their
eyebrows had lifted when he had told them that Blair was his partner, only then did they relax as
they commented that he had maybe spent too long in Vice, and were they working undercover?

Jim had wanted to get Blair away from the dig and back to his territory, but Blair had dug his heels
in, refusing to leave until Rainer's second archaeologist had arrived on the site. The man had listened
carefully and then Blair taken him to the site. Even the death of Welland couldn't play down the
excitement of the find. Dr. Malcolm Lake was excited and tried his best to ignore the hovering
sentinel that shadowed the every move he made with the anthropology TA. Dr. Lake had an easy
smile. "The only problem is the Grace Company. They are developing the area and the clock is still
running on them. Dean Hammond is going to approach the owner but don't keep your fingers
crossed.”

Jim smile was like the Cheshire cat's.

"Jim?” Blair sounded puzzled.

"Don't worry about your find, Chief. The Grace Company will be more than happy to give you,
personally, an extension on this find."

"You sound like you know the owner,” Lake cut in.

"Could say I am on very good terms with him." He let it go at that. "Okay, Chief, show the
archaeologist the Guide's Temple."

"The what?"

"The guide's temple, Dr. Lake. It is a temple for guides."

The doctor increased his pace. He had to see this. It was the find of the century.

None of the students had elected to leave the dig and they had readily volunteered to work around
the clock to gather as much data as they could on the Temple of the Guides.

On the last day of the dig Dr. Lake came up to Jim. "I don't know how you did it, but the Grace
Company is willing to give us as much time as we need to work on the temple. They are talking of
incorporating the temple in their plan. "How did you do that?”

"Grace Company is owned by the Ellison Corporation. That answer you doctor?” Lake's mouth
dropped. All he could do was nod.

Finally Jim and Blair were on their way home. It was nighttime when they approached the lights of Cascade. Blair had the laptop open and was typing away, one leg braced. They pulled over on the outskirts of Cascade and Blair dug out Jim's cell phone, connected the two and dialled.

"Sharpe."

"Hi, Colin, its Blair. Yeah Jim is here. No, I am not putting a white fog on, he's okay right man; get the picture. Okay. I have some data I want you to post on the Internet, all relevant sites, and it's got to be like quick right? This is the goal."

"Major player?" Colin was now listening very carefully.

"Yes."

Colin grinned. //GDP//.

"Okay Blair send it now."

Jim watched as his guide connected his laptop to the cell phone, then a few minutes later, he closed the laptop again and grinned, seeing an answering one in his sentinel's face.

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Jim dumped their things onto the floor of the loft, for once not caring about the mess.

He turned around and Blair was standing very close.

"Sentinel," the voice was one of command. Blair's hand reached up, snagging the front of Jim's jacket and pulling him forward and down, so that they were nose to nose. "Bond, now." It wasn't a request; it was an order from the Dark Guide. "We bond now, sentinel, make you mine, Claim and Marked."

Jim pulled back; he heard the cry of frustration and need from his guide. "Its all right I just want to secure the territory."

He slid the bolts into place and felt a sense of peace run through him as he heard his guide climb the steps to his room. He took the stairs two at a time, his need to bond now matching that of his guide.

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Dr. Wentworth looked at the two people in front of him, Detective Ellison and Blair Sandburg. It was, and it wasn't. The young man he knew as Blair Sandburg wore muti-coloured vests and layers of clothing. This Blair was dressed all in black and he moved with an almost sensual grace, the doctor noted at the reaction of his secretary to the guide. "Any idea of what they're going to do with the temple?"

"The GDP would like to keep it covered up, but since it was leaked on the Internet last night, along with pictures, then it's going to be hard. I wonder how they are going to react to that?

“I also heard that Ellison Corporation is financing the dig. There wouldn't be any connection…?"

He saw the small nod of the head.

"I have Malcolm Lake to lead up the dig. This is going to be major, something to rival KV5 in the
"Valley of the Kings. The men that died with Dr. Welland, Detective do you know who they were?"

"Both former GDP who had been let go, surprise, surprise."

"Well, Detective, the genie is out of the bottle now, and it can't be put back. And, Blair, this is the press release. The embargo on the find was lifted this morning."

Blair took the sheet of paper, and his fingers tightened on it. "I'm credited with finding the temple."

Jim leaned over to look at the sheet and read it out aloud. "Blair Sandburg, BA, MA, Doctorate Candidate, that about sums it up Chief."

"But I'm a guide."

"Blair, at this university you are a graduate student, not a guide. You have no objection, Sentinel Prime?"

Jim grinned, none at all. His hand patted his guide to reassure him.

"You will, of course, write a paper on the find. I know of a lot of people who are interested in the site."

"A paper," Blair breathed, his face bright. His career was back. Jim was happy; his guide was back in the place he belonged.

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The bullpen detectives were glad to see their sentinel and the young guide, who was fast becoming the Major Crime mascot, back safely in the office. They had heard the edited highlights, but for all of it there was a certain relaxation in the pair, so the holiday might have done them some good after all.

Rafe turned to H. "Notice the clothes."

"All black again," H said and saw his partner nod, both coming to the same conclusion. Blair number 2 was in the driver's seat, god help them.

Sentinel Prime Edwards came into the bullpen, crossing to Jim. "The Watch is yours, Senior Sentinel Prime. Welcome back."

"Had a good holiday Jim?"

"Different Edwards. Very different."

"Mind if I speak to Blair?"

"You'll find him at the coffee machine. And Edwards? Don't worry, I'm not going to tear your throat out for speaking to him without asking."

"Sorry, old habits die hard."

It was late afternoon when Sentinel and Guide arrived back at Ranier, the starting point of their adventure.

The Dean looked nervously from sentinel to guide. "Thank you for coming, Sentinel Prime Ellison, I am sorry that I have to call you in, but this does concern your guide." Dr. Welland was the driving force behind an attempt to have your guide removed from the PhD program. I am pleased to say that your guide has been cleared by the committee of any misdoings and is free to continue as a TA and student."
Blair felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He had the feeling that his sentinel knew what was going on. He looked across at the Dean's pride and joy, that model of the new wing, and noticed the logo: Ellison Corporation. Jim's father had called on the Dean. For a moment he was mortified, then suddenly it went as he felt the hand on his shoulder, and the soft words, "Family protects family, Chief."

He had a family, now. It was no longer just he and Naomi. He was a part of something much larger. A family that would put money, a large amount of it, to keep his career online. And for that he would be forever grateful.

The End

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