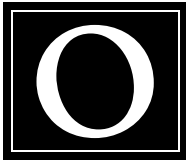


Introduction

David Farland Discoveries



Opening a manuscript is like opening a birthday present. The box may be wrapped in dull brown paper or in fine shiny foil, but until you open it, you never know whether the contents will live up to your hopes. Stories are that way too.

For many years, I've been helping to discover new writers. You may have heard of some of them. As a young author, I was once asked by an editor to help pick a book to push big for the coming year. I picked a book called *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. A couple of years later, a young student asked me how to write the bestselling young adult novel of all time, so for an hour or so we discussed the possibility of writing a

contemporary fantasy set in Forks, Washington, which dealt with vampires and werewolves. The resulting novel, *Twilight*, found the audience that Stephenie Meyer was searching for.

Through my own writing workshops, through the college courses I've taught, and through my work as lead judge with the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future program, I've helped discover dozens of writers who have gone on to become *New York Times* bestsellers or win major awards.

Each of those writers has their own strengths, their own messages. The works of Brandon Sanderson might not appeal to the audiences of J.K. Rowling or Eric Flint or Jessica Day George or James Dashner, but when I see talent, I notice.

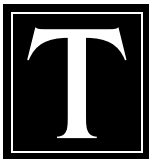
Which brings me to Shean Pao. I knew from the moment that I began reading *The Feather and the Moon Well* that she was a young lady with a great deal of potential, the kind whose fantasy novels will bear rereading and will be loved by audiences around the world.

So it is with great delight that I introduce Shean Pao ...

—David Farland

Chapter One

A Knight's Tale



he wind gusted at Anarra's cloak with sudden fervor, causing her to press into a shielded alcove and yank up her fallen hood. *Did anyone see me?* She searched the crowded fair, her hand keeping her hood in check, but the nearby townsfolk were watching acrobats on a stage. No one seemed to have noticed the diminutive figure in gray.

She wondered why she had come to the city, but she couldn't recall. Painting supplies? Not smart to risk being caught over pigments and brushes. *They might find me.*

She didn't remember what "they" looked like, or their names. There was little of her past that she could bring to mind anymore, but the terror of it still haunted her.

You came to ease your loneliness.

Anarra winced at that thought, holding her hood fast while stepping into the causeway.

Someone grabbed her hand. She spun, alarmed.

An auburn-haired knight bent a knee in the mud before Anarra's small frame, gripping her fingers tighter when she tried to pull away. His helm rested in the crook of his other arm, plumed in an array of short, blue feathers. A surcoat emblazoned in teal and yellow lay over his gambeson. "I plead with you, milady." He spoke loudly. "Will you not wear my favor and grant me good fortune in the next tournament?"

The knight's brazen actions attracted a passing group of commoners. They moved to encircle Anarra and her suitor.

She stared hard at the knight, confused by the magical pull that emanated from him. *He is just a man. No need to fear him.*

"What are you doing?" she whispered close to his ear while he knelt. She noticed blue-gray eyes, full lips, and broad shoulders, but his handsome features stirred wariness within her rather than attraction.

"Asking for your Lady's favor," he whispered back. Their gazes met, and a sly smile tilted his lips.

He's using a Compelling! Anarra straightened, shocked that his meager spell had the ability to hold her.

Irritation added to her fear as she perceived how the surrounding crowd unknowingly added their energy to his trap. He was drawing on their *bri* to strengthen the spell.

Circles held power, she knew, especially ones created by people who fixed their attention upon an object in its center. She saw it all flash within his devious eyes. That was why he'd made a scene of kneeling in the mud—to draw a crowd.

This obviously wasn't his first attempt at a Compelling; he was too skilled. *How many other unfortunates has he forced into his will with his powers?* She supposed his elevated station had resulted from witchery. Here was a knight with no honor.

He must have expected the anger in her thoughts, for he shook his head and said, "I would not do something you might regret." He glanced casually at the surrounding group, his expression calculating.

Anarra let go of her hood and clutched the small bag of fragrant wizard's purple hanging from her girdle. She crushed the delicate flowers, trying to control her rage. Was there a way to extract herself without alerting the crowd? *I must handle this subtly. Once I am free of him I can vanish into the throng of people and cast a Scattering to obscure myself.*

A tendril of fear curled in her mind. She'd already lingered too long in Ethcabar. The city was dangerous for so many reasons. She still had time—if she left now.

"Gracious knight," she said, "you appeal to a lady who is not worthy of your attention. I must decline." It