



# M. L. E. Modessitt, Jr.

The

# SHADOW SORCERESS

Book Four of The Spellsong Cycle

L. E. Modesitt, Jr.

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Map by Ed Gazsi

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In addition to The Spellsong Cycle, **L. E. Modesitt, Jr.** is the author of the bestselling Recluce fantasy series and many science-fiction novels. He lives in Cedar City, Utah.

Find out more about L. E. Modesitt, Jr. and other Orbit authors by registering for the free monthly newsletter at [www.orbitbooks.co.uk](http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk)

Praise for *The Soprano Sorceress*, Book One of The Spellsong Cycle:

‘Resplendent . . . fantasy with an inventive and expertly handled scenario, life-sized characters and flawless plotting’

*Kirkus Reviews*

‘Begins a new, enchantingly musical series . . . Modesitt paints a convincing picture of a mature woman with integrity, who, when given power and opportunity, rises from doormat to beneficent leader . . . Watching Anna disprove the old adage about absolute power and corruption makes this . . . a good deal of fun’

*Publisher's Weekly*

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The Magic Engineer  
The Order War  
The Death of Chaos  
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The Spellsong War  
Darksong Rising  
The Shadow Sorceress

The Parafaith War  
Adiamante  
Gravity Dreams

For  
Susan, Kacy and Ava

## CHARACTERS

**Anna** *Former Regent of Defalk; Sorceress and Lady of Loiseau (Mencha)*

**Secca** *Lady of Flossbend (Synope) and sorceress; sorceress heir to Loiseau.*

**Robero** *Lord of Defalk, and Lord of Elheld, Falcor, and Synfal (Cheor)*

**Alyssa** *Consort of Robero*

**Dythya** *Counselor of Finance*

**Jirsit** *Arms-commander of Defalk*

### LORDS OF DEFALK: THE THIRTY-THREE:

**Alseta** *Lady of Mossbach; consort is Barat; son is Lyendar*

**Birke** *Lord of Abenfel; consort is Reylana; mother is Fylena*

**Cataryzna** *Lady of Sudwei; consort is Skent; heir is Skansor*

**Chelshay** *Lady of Wendel; consort is Nerylt, son of Clethner*

**Clethner** *Lord of Nordland; son and heir is Lythner*

**Dinfan** *Lady of Suhl; consort is Wasle, brother of Birke*

**Dostal** *Lord of Aroch; consort is Ruetha*

**Ebraak** *Lord of Nordfels*

**Falar** *Warder of Uslyn, heir to Fussen; also consort to Herene, Lady of Pamr*

**Fustar** *Lord of Issl; son and sole heir is Kylar*

**Gylaron** *Lord of Lerona; consort is Reyland; heir is Gylan;  
father of Reylana*

**Herene** *Lady of Pamr; consort is Falar; heir is Kysar*

**Kinor** *Lord of Westfort [Denguic] and Lord of the  
Western Marches*

**Mietchel** *Lord of Morra, brother of Lady Wendella of  
Stromwer*

**Selber** *Lord of Silberfels; heir is Helbar; sister is Belvera*

**Tiersen** *Lord of Dubaria; consort is Lysara; eldest son  
and heir is Lystar*

**Uslyn** *Lord heir of Fussen; father was Ustal, mother  
Yelean*

**Ytrude** *Lady of Mossbach, sister of Tiersen; consort is  
Cens*

**Wendella** *Lady of Stromwer, heir is Condell*

**Zybar** *Lord of Arien*

## **SORCERERS AND SORCERESSES:**

**Anandra** *Sorceress assistant to Clayre*

**Clayre** *Sorceress of Defalk*

**Jolyn** *Assistant Sorceress of Defalk*

## **FOSTERLINGS, APPRENTICES, AND PAGES:**

**Jeagyn** *Fosterling/sorceress apprentice at Loiseau*

**Kerisel** *Fosterling/sorceress apprentice at Loiseau*

**Richina** *Apprentice sorceress to Secca; daughter of Dinfan*

## **DEFALKAN ARMSMEN:**

**Elfens** *Chief Archer, Loiseau*

**Drysel** *Captain, Loiseau*

**Quebar** *Captain, Loiseau*

**Rickel** *Lord's Guard-Captain, Falcor*

**Wilten** *Overcaptain, Loiseau*



## DEFALKAN PLAYERS:

**Bretnay** *Violino, Loiseau*  
**Delvor** *Chief of second players, Loiseau*  
**Duralt** *Falk-horn, Loiseau*  
**Palian** *Chief Player, Loiseau*  
**Rowal** *Woodwind, Loiseau*  
**Yuarl** *Chief Player, Falcor*

## OTHERS OUTSIDE DEFALK:

**Alya** *Matriarch of Ranuak; consort is Aetlen*  
**Alcaren** *Cousin to the Matriarch*  
**Ashtaar** *Leader, Council of Wei, Nordwei*  
**Ayselin** *Holder of Netzla, Neserea*  
**Belmar** *Holder of Worlan, Neserea*  
**Clehar** *Lord High Counselor of Dumar; without consort*  
**Hadrenn** *Lord High Counselor of Ebra; Lord of Synek,  
     Ebra; consort is Belvera; heir is Haddev; younger son is  
     Verad*  
**Hanfor** *Lord High Counselor of Neserea; consort is  
     Aerlya; eldest daughter and heiress is Annayal*  
**Kestrin** *Liedfuhr of Mansuur; brother of Aerlya*  
**Maitre of Sturinn** *Leader of Sturinn; master of the  
     Sea-Priests*  
**Motolla** *Holder of Itzel, Neserea; heir is Chyalar*  
**Mynntar** *Lord of Dolov, Ebra*  
**Stepan** *Arms-master of Synek*  
**Svenmar** *Holder of Nesalia, Neserea*  
**Veria** *Second Counselor, Freewoman of Elahwa*



# CONTINENT OF LIEDWAHR





# 1

Two sorceresses stood beside the scrying pool in the domed outbuilding that lay to the south of the main keep of Loiseau. The taller woman had fine white-blonde hair, hair that could have belonged to the young woman of nineteen that her appearance conveyed. Her thin and finely drawn face was without blemish, without lines, and her piercing blue eyes were clear. Only the fineness of Anna's features attested to her true age. Her figure was nearly as slender, and far more girlish than that of the smaller redhead who stood next to her.

Anna eased into a straight-backed chair behind the small writing table, then looked at the redhead. 'Secca . . . our good Lord Robero has requested that you visit him at Elheld, preferably within the next two weeks.'

'Doubtless he has yet another heir or lord for me to meet, Lady Anna.' Secca's mouth offered a sardonic smile as she perched on the tiled edge of the scrying pool. Part of her smile was because Anna had never been able to say 'Robero' without a twist to her lips. Then Secca had difficulty herself. When Secca had been growing up in Falcor under Anna's tutelege, Robero had been 'Jimbob.' Only when he'd become Lord of Defalk had he decided 'Jimbob' was too undignified and changed his name to Robero. 'After all these years, he would still have me consorted.'

'You aren't *that* old.' Anna added, 'He doesn't understand you, but he does care for you.'

'That may be, for he understands women not at all. He understands but strength and power, and that is why he respects you, lady.'

Anna sighed gently. 'I wish it were otherwise. Certainly we tried.'

Secca nodded sympathetically. While Anna almost never used Lord Jecks' name, Anna often said 'we' when referring to what the two had accomplished for Defalk in the less than half score of years when Anna had been regent and sole ruler of Defalk. The former regent spoke seldom of Lord Jecks; but Secca had seen the lamps of Anna's rooms still lit late into many nights over the ten years since his death. While Anna and Jecks had been friends and certainly lovers, consorting had been out of the question. *That* Secca had understood from the beginning, when Anna had effectively adopted her after the deaths of Secca's parents, for Jecks had been a powerful lord in his own right, and the grandsire of Lord Robero, during the time when Anna had been Sorceress-Regent for the underage Robero.

'Despite his inclinations, Robero has learned much,' Anna continued, 'and I am thankful for Alyssa.'

'So am I,' replied Secca.

'You know I never would have consorted you to him.'

'Alyssa made it that much easier.'

The two sorceresses laughed. Then Anna cleared her throat.

'You have something else I am to do?' asked Secca.

'Kylar . . .' Anna said.

Secca winced. 'The one who suffocated his consort and claimed she died of consumption?' Anna nodded.

'You wish me to go to Issl as well?'

'I think you should go there first.' The older sorceress smiled. 'You will be paying my respects to Lord Fustar. He will be most happy to see your young and smiling face.' The smile vanished. 'The pool shows that Kylar does not understand what has happened in Defalk, and that he will abuse any woman he can. He now seeks yet another consort.' Anna looked at Secca. 'You understand how you must deal with

Kylar, and with Lord Fustar? Nothing must happen to Kylar while you are at Issl.'

'I understand, lady. Nothing will occur.' Secca inclined her head. 'I could take the players, and we could stop and add a dek to the road between Mencha and the River Chean on the south end, and then add another dek or so on our return journey from Elheld.'

Anna shook her head. 'You dislike Robero, and yet you would work to finish paving the road he demands.'

'Why not? He is likely to be lord for many years to come, and it will speed our travel from Loiseau to Elheld.' She laughed. 'At times, I would that there were other ways to build his roads.'

'In Defalk, there are no other ways.' Anna shook her head. 'Robero doesn't have enough men or engineers – or the golds to pay for them – and he cannot call on the Lords for anything other than their liedgeld and their levies in battle.'

'So we must build roads and bridges.'

'It's not all drudgery without rewards, Secca,' Anna pointed out. 'People know we build roads and bridges, and it helps associate sorcery with good things. Given how this land has regarded sorceresses in the past, that's not all bad.'

'I know.' Secca grinned suddenly. 'I could also use sorcery to repair a wall or bridge or something for Lord Fustar . . . as a gesture from Loiseau.'

The older sorceress smiled. 'That might help.'

'It is hard to see shadows in the light of a favor.'

'Sometimes,' Anna replied. 'Sometimes. Other times, light makes the shadows more obvious. This time, I think you're right.'

'When should I leave? Tomorrow?'

'If you wish to spend time on the highway and several days being a charming guest at Issl.'

Secca nodded, then tilted her head. 'Lady Anna?'

'Yes? You have that serious tone.'



'I would that you would wait until I return before you send your next scroll to your daughter in the Mist Worlds.'

Anna nodded politely.

'At least I could play for you and lessen the effort.'

'We will see,' replied the Sorceress and Lady of Mencha. 'I'm not ancient yet.'

'Lady . . .' Secca tried not to plead, but to convey her concern.

'Secca . . .' Anna laughed. 'Don't turn me into a doddering old lady.'

'No one could do that.' The younger sorceress smiled at Anna's tone, smiled in spite of her worries, for she had seen the deepening darkness behind her foster-mother's eyes, and sensed the ever-increasing strain that even the lightest of Clearsong spells placed on Anna, for all that Anna looked little different from what she had more than a score of years earlier when first she had arrived in Defalk from the Mist Worlds.

## 2

In the midmorning light of early fall, before harvest, a half-score of players stood on the low rise to the west of the dusty road. The majority held violinos or violas, but there were also two woodwinds and a falk-horn in the group. Another half-score of players bearing lutars of various sizes stood behind the first group.

Secca, wearing a pale blue tunic, walked toward Palian, the gray-haired and gray-eyed woman who held a violino, and who stood before the first group of players. 'Chief player?'

'Yes, Lady Secca,' replied Palian. 'We have almost finished tuning.'

'Good.' Secca nodded, accepting as always the necessary

formality of Palian's address. 'We will be using the second building spell.' That too was a formality, since Secca and Lady Anna had always used the second building spell for road-building, although it had been years since Anna had done heavy building sorcery.

Secca glanced out at the dusty road that stretched northward toward the River Chean from Mencha. Behind her, nearly thirty deks of sorcery-laid stone paving extended back to Mencha. The gap between where she stood and the paved section stretching south from the river bridge was less than ten deks, and she hoped that she would be able to complete that section within the next few years, but that depended on what other tasks Lady Anna and Lord Robero laid upon her. She looked toward the lank-haired Delvor, catching his eye.

'Second players are ready, lady.'

Secca studied the image on the portable easel, an image with which she was all too familiar, and began to bring up both the image of the road, and the spellsong itself, into her mind. 'The second building spell, chief player.'

'The second building spell, on my mark,' declared Palian. 'Mark!'

As the notes from the players and their instruments rose into the morning, the first two bars merely to stabilize the players, Secca waited, and then began the spell proper with the first note of the third measure.

*' . . . replicate the earth and stones.  
Place them in their proper zones . . .  
Set all firm, and set all square,  
weld them to their pattern there . . . '*

Even before the notes of the players and Secca's voice died away, an intense bluish glow settled over the dusty track, initially so bright that neither Secca nor the players could have looked at it, had they wanted to, but all had seen the

brightness over the years with each new section of road built.

Secca held herself erect against the faint dizziness that always came with heavy sorcery such as road-building, then walked to her mount, a gray mare, and took out her water bottle for a long swallow, before eating several biscuits from her provisions bag. After eating, she turned and looked at the newly created section of paved road.

Like the sections created before over the years, the road-way itself was exactly eight yards across, and raised almost a third of a yard above the surrounding ground. On each side was a stone rain gutter, and every hundred yards, there was a side drain. The stone roadbed had a slight crown, enough that the infrequent rains of eastern Defalk would run off into the lower rain gutters. Beneath were layers of stone and gravel going almost a yard deep.

'How do you feel, sorceress?' asked Palian.

'Fine.' Secca smiled. 'How are the players?'

'We can do another spell, perhaps two.'

'We'll move up to the end of what we've finished here and do another section,' Secca said. 'Then we'll ride north and see how we feel when we reach where the paved section coming from the north begins. I'd like to finish this road before . . .' She shrugged, not certain what comparison might even be useful. 'I'd like to see it finished.'

'We can add another dek or so on our return from Issl and Elheld, can we not?' asked Palian.

'I would think so,' Secca replied. 'I'd like to be able to tell Lady Anna that we can have the entire road paved within a few more years.' Generally, a road spell was good for about five hundred yards – half a dek.

'You will.' Palian smiled.

'I hope so.' Secca nodded.

'Players, prepare to mount and ride!' ordered the chief player.

Secca folded the small easel, and turned back toward her own mount.