

M.L.E. Modessitt, Jr.

The SPELLSONG WAR



Book Two of The Spellsong Cycle

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ORBIT

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Map by Ed Graszi

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L. E. Modesitt, Jr., is the author of the bestselling Recluce fantasy series and many science fiction novels. He lives in Cedar City, Utah.

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'

Publishers Weekly

To
my one and only soprano sorceress

CHARACTERS

Anna *Regent of Defalk and Lady of Loiseau [Mencha]*

Jimbob *Heir to Defalk [Falcor]*

Hanfor *Arms Commander of Defalk*

Dythya *Counselor of Finance*

Essan *Lady and widow of Lord Donjim*

Herene *Younger sister of Lady Gatrune [Pamr]*

Herstat *Saalmeister of Eldheld*

Menares *Counselor*

Lord of Defalk

LORDS OF DEFALK

Jecks *Lord of Elheld [Elhi], Advisor to the Regent*

Arkad *Lord of Synfal [Cheor]*

Birfels *Lord of Abenfel; consort is Fylena*

Clethner *Lord of Nordland*

Dannel *Lord of Mossbach; consort is Resengna*

Dencer *Lord of Stromwer; consort is Wendella*

Fustar *Lord of Issl*

Gatrune *Lady of Pamr*

Geansor *Lord of Sudwei*

Genrica *Lord of Wendel*

Gylaron *Lord of Lerona, consort is Reylan*

Hryding *Lord of Flossbend [Synope]; consort is Anientta*

Jearle *Lord of Denguic*

Klestayr *Lord of Aroch*

Mietchel *Lord of Morra*

Nelmor *Lord of Dubaria; eldest son and heir is Tiersen*

Sargol *Lord of Suhl*

Tybel *Lord of Arien*

Vlassa *Lord of Fussen; heirs are twin sons, Ustal and Falar*

Vyarl *Rider of Heinene*

FOSTERLINGS AND PAGES

Alseta *Daughter of Chief Player Liende*

Barat *Page*

Birke *Heir of Lord Birfels [Stromwer]*

Cataryzna *Daughter and heir of Lord Geansor [Sudwei]*

Cens *Page*

Hoede *Youngest son of Lord Dannel [Mossbach]*

Kinor *Son of Chief Player Liende*

Lysara *Daughter of Lord Birfels [Stromwer]*

Resor *Page*

Secca *Daughter of Lord Hryding [Flossbend]*

Skent *Page*

Ytrude *Daughter of Lord Nelmor [Dubaria]*

DEFALKAN ARMSMEN

Alvar *Captain*

Himar *Captain*

Jirsit *Undercaptain*

DEFALKAN PLAYERS

Daffyd *Viola; first Chief Player*

Liende *Woodwind; second Chief Player*

Delvor *Violino*

Duralt *Falk horn*

Hassett *Violino*

Kaseth *Violino*

Pallian *Violino*

Yuarl *Violino*

OTHERS OUTSIDE DEFALK

Ashtaar *Spymistress of Nordwei*

Behlem *Prophet of Music, Lord of Neserea; consort is Cyndyth*

Bertmynn *Lord of Dolov, Ebra*

Ehara *Lord of Dumar; consort is Siobion*

Hadrenn *Lord of Synek, Ebra*

Konsstin *Liedfuhr of Mansuur*

Maitre of Sturinn *Leader of Sturinn; master of the Sea-Priests*

Matriarch *Head of State, Ranuak; consort is Ulgar*

Nubara *Overcaptain of Lancers, Mansuur, stationed in Neserea*

Rabyn *Heir of Behlem, Neserea*

Tybra *Leader, Council of Wei, Nordwei*



CONTINENT OF LIEDWAHR



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ALSO BY L. E. MODESITT, JR.

The Saga of Recluce
The Magic of Recluce
The Towers of the Sunset
The Magic Engineer
The Order War
The Death of Chaos
Fall of Angels
The Chaos Balance

The Spellsong Cycle
The Soprano Sorceress

The Parafaith War

I

OUVERTURE

WEI, NORDWEI

The heavy gong sounds, and the two women in the uniform of the Council turn and open the lacquered double doors, each bearing the ancient symbol of the Council of Wei. Each wears twin black-lacquered scabbards at her hips, and the scabbards contain the infamous short swords of the Nordan Guard.

Ashtaar moistens her lips and steps through the doors, then down the black carpet toward the dais.

The black-lacquered Council table is also ancient, and behind it sit seven figures. The woman in the center wears a silver-and-black seal on a heavy silver chain. Her dark eyes hold Ashtaar as the spymistress walks down the dark green carpet toward the space below the dais holding the table.

'The mist-world sorceress now holds Defalk. The Council has read your report, and would like to inquire further.'

'Yes, Ancient One.' Ashtaar bows.

'Please summarize the major events that led to the current state of affairs. Briefly.'

'A travel sorceress and a player summoned the lady Anna from the mist worlds. Both are dead now. The sorcerer Brill spirited her away and tutored her in the ways of both Darksong and Clearsong. The Dark Ones tried to kill her and failed. She supported Lord Barjim against the Ebrans at the Sand Pass. Barjim and Brill were killed, and she collapsed, but not before she destroyed two-thirds of the invaders. She somehow found her way south and recovered in Synope, in the lands of Lord Hryding. Lord Behlem of Neserea then marched into Defalk and took Falcor, but

not before Lord Jecks rescued the heir, his grandson Lord Jimbob. Lord Behlem offered his support to the sorceress, and she accepted it and went to Falcor. The Dark Ones gathered another army and marched toward Falcor. The sorceress used water magic and song to destroy the entire Ebran army and all the darksingers in Defalk. The Evult responded by flooding the Fal and destroying half of Falcor. Lord Behlem attempted to remove the lady Anna, and she used her sorcery to kill him and his consort and enlist the support of many of the Neserean troops in Falcor. Then she proclaimed a regency for young Jimbob. Shortly, almost at the dawn of winter, she marched a small force through the Ostfels and used her sorcery to destroy the Evult, the city of Vult, and most of Synek. She almost died, but the lords of Defalk, especially Lord Jecks, rallied behind her. So did the people. She has a reputation for being good and fair, and vindictively just.' Ashtaar bows once more.

'The rains now fall on Defalk, do they not?' asks the red-haired woman to the left of the Council leader.

'Yes. The sorceress removed the chains on the clouds when she destroyed the Evult.'

'Will the sorceress attempt to rule directly and put young Jimbob out of the way?' asks the dark-haired Council leader.

'That does not appear likely. She can have no children and has, in effect, adopted the boy.'

'And Lord Jecks has not objected?'

'He publicly supports the sorceress. As do the lords Birlfels, Nelmor, Hryding, Geansor, Clethner, and the lady Gatrune, and the Rider of Heinene. There are doubtless others, and none of the thirty-three have raised voice or hand against her.'

'With her powers, I doubt any of sound mind would do so,' suggests the Council leader. 'Are there any whispers of discontent?'

'Almost none that we have been able to track. She holds but one hostage, and that is Wendella, the consort of Lord

Dencer of Stromwer. Dencer is rumored to be less than happy.'

'No others?'

'None that we know or can scry.'

'What of Ebra?'

'The land has been flattened, mostly by the floods she unleashed down the river Elha, and Vult lies buried under the fire peak the Ebrans are calling Zauberinferner. Hadrenn has claimed the ruins of Synek. He is one of the sons of an ancient lord, and several pretenders are struggling over Elawha. A lord named Bertmynn is raising armsmen in Dolov. He wishes to be lord of all Ebra.' Ashtaar waits.

'We have received a scroll from the Liedfuhr. He protests our interference in Defalk. He also informs us that young Rabyn is the Lord of Neserea and under his protection and regency. What beyond that do you know?' The dark-haired Council leader smiles faintly.

'He has dispatched fiftyscore lancers to Neserea. They were delayed by the snows in the Mittpass, but travel the south road through the Great Western Forest.'

'Spymistress of Nordwei . . . is it fair to say that a year ago we faced possible threats from the Prophet of Music and the Dark Ones, and both have been destroyed?'

'Yes, Leader Tybra.'

'Is it also fair to say that you chose not to remove the soprano sorceress?' asks Tybra.

'I waited to see whether the Dark Ones and the Prophet were successful in their attempts. The Dark Ones failed in four attempts. The Prophet and his consort failed as well. We have been able to trace at least two attempts by Neserea.' Ashtaar inclines her head. 'I thought it best not to turn the sorceress's wrath against Nordwei.'

'So . . . now we have a strong and united Defalk on our southern borders, and this is your doing?'

'We have a united Defalk, ruled by a woman for the first time in recorded history, and a Defalk that will take a decade

or longer to recover from the drought and depredations of the Dark Ones and the Nesereans.'

'That is what you say. For now . . . for now, we shall see. You may go, but do not hesitate to inform the Council should this sorceress take any action that could possibly affect Nordwei.'

'Yes, leader Tybra.' Ashtaar bows a last time, then turns. She does not wipe the dampness from her forehead.

2

Through the scarcely cracked high window behind her, Anna could hear the half-frozen rain clattering on the stones of the liedburg. The entire keep felt damp, and even the small fire in her receiving room and de facto office wasn't enough to remove the dampness. She needed the slight draft from the window to keep from being suffocated from the fireplace, which drew poorly with small fires.

Sorceress, Regent of Defalk, Protector of the Heir, not to mention being Lady of Loiseau, and she had to worry about firewood. She hadn't thought about firewood being a problem – but nearly a decade of drought had wrought enormous damage on the once-wide forests of Defalk.

Then, there was so much that she'd never thought she'd have to consider. She'd been trained to be a professional opera singer, and fallen back on university teaching with the demands of Avery's career. Later when he'd left her and the children for his slim blonde young thing, the teaching, and several additional part-time jobs, had become necessities. Anna laughed softly to herself. She was slimmer and younger looking than Paulina now, and Avery – the self-styled Antonio, king of the comprimarios – would never know. Neither would Mario and Elizabetta. Irenia . . . Anna's eyes