

## Sorceress of Faith, Cut Scene

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*This is one of the first scenes I wrote – as you can see, much change occurred in the story. Jaquar has not suffered the loss of his parents and the sangvile that killed them was still on the move. I actually toyed with putting this in the end of Guardian of Honor or as a preview of Sorceress of Faith.*

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The next day, Jaquar leaned back in his seat in the amphitheater on Parteger Island and watched the show. All thirty of the sorcerers and sorceresses who lived in towers on the islands off Lladrana had showed up except the greatest – and oldest – Bossgonde. And most of them were down in the stage-pentagram area in the middle arguing. It was supposed to be a rational debate as to whether to have the Marshalls Summon an Exotique for the Towers – and when.

He looked on the scene with mild amusement. They couldn't get along, the "discussion" had deteriorated into raking over old insults, but he'd rather be among this outspoken, individual bunch than with the Marshalls, whose politics were among friends and quietly nasty.

Just as well the acrimony was taking place down in the middle, the magic would prevent any sorcerous duels and the pentagram would be soaking up all the excess energy and storing it. Just as well he was up here instead of down there, too, or he'd be word-slinging with the rest of them.

Jaquar felt sure that the others agreed with him that they would need the Exotique. Anyone with the slightest foresight knew that the next step in the fight to save their land – their world, fell to the Towers. His fellows weren't even quibbling about the price – essentially a library of spell books concerning the weapon and battle magic and the horrors that invaded. Were sent to invade Lladrana. Every sorcerer worth his or her salt had extra copies of those books already. Price wasn't an issue.

When was a bit of a concern – there were five more times the dimensional link would be made with the Exotique land over the next year and a half. He held the opinion that the very next Summoning should be theirs. No opportunity should be missed.

His mouth grimmed. He sensed they would need every chance and every Exotique they could Summon. The soul of his world, Ameer, was struggling, weak, and they must ensure it lived.

He closed his eyes and imagined himself on his island, in his Tower, sitting at his desk. He wafted a sheet of paper onto his desk, uncapped the purple inkbottle and picked up the pen to compose a note to the Marshalls. "Your price for Summoning an Exotique to work with the Towers will be met."

Then, he listed the books they'd receive. The best, the most important – not too many that they wouldn't read or cherish them, but if he gauged the thirst for knowledge by the loremarshall, Bastien and Alexa right, they'd be used. And he wasn't giving them enough time to refuse what the Marshalls needed.

Jaquar attached a standard list of qualities needed for an apprentice, and ended. "She must be of wide and flexible mind, must have the twelve tones of power." Alexa had had ten, and ten was fine for a Marshall, but the Towers would need twelve.

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Frowning, he wondered if the Marshalls normally counted the tones of power. Then he shrugged. The Marshalls would use his letter and the qualifications for their Summoning spell, and when the chant went out to the Exotique land, the proper one would respond. He rippled distance and placed the paper on the loremarshalls desk with a little spell that it be discovered at the correct moment.

Smack! The sound jerked his attention back to the amphitheater to see a red hand mark on Charlmon's face. Jaquar winced in sympathy, that must hurt. Venetria stood in front of Charlmon, hair ruffled, magnificent bosom heaving. Jaquar deeply admired Venetria's looks and skills, as did most of the younger sorcerers, none of them was fool enough to mix in the love-hate relationship between Charlmon and the lady.

Jaquar's mind drifted back to the love between his parents he'd seen the night before. That was what most wanted – a matched pairing. The love of the couple who loved each other and rescued him from the streets of Sparee City, brought him into the warm circle of their love, was what had saved him.

Unfortunately the relationship between Charlmon and Venetria was what most sorcerers and sorceresses got.

Jacquar stood and projected his voice. "Has this quarreling deteriorated to pointlessness? For myself, I want the Exotique Summoned, and at the next proper conjunction of moon and stars. I am willing to pay the price."

"And get an Exotique of incredible power for an apprentice," a sorceress said.

Jacquar smiled. That was what most of the fighting had been about, who would carry the new Exotique off to their Tower.

"I think we should consider this whole topic most carefully," quavered an old man and Jaquar wasn't sure which of the trio of minor sorcerers spoke.

Smiling, Jaquar said. "Consider all you want. That is my opinion and the option I cast my vote for. As for having the Exotique as an apprentice, I would imagine that would depend on his or her power bent." He lied. From what he could tell, Alexa could have turned her hand to any sort of magic, and he'd wager the new Exotique would be strong enough to do the same.

"But Summoning the Exotique is not the only item of discussion. There's the matter of a loose sangvile, and an upcoming battle." He'd shared the feycocu's sight of the sangvile attacking Alexa and the words it had said to Alexa. "My forecasting has not shown a battle, but it is not my best magic." No lie there.

Silence thundered.

Charlmon took Venetria's hand, kissed her fingers, brought her close, then glanced up to Jaquar. "If we are to discuss blood and battle, I would prefer to be in a warm hall with wine and mead."

"I take it your forecasting showed the battle then."

Charlmon jerked his head. "Of course. It was a hovering smear a couple of days ago. Now it's a deep, jagged line on my forecast chart. My island and Tower is closest, let's adjourn to it."

"I said we would stand with the chevaliers of the field in the battle."

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"Of course," Charlmon and Venetria said in unison. Most of the others echoed the phrase.

Most, not all.

Jacquar stared at the group thoughtfully, at the apprentices and journeyfolk seated in the first rows of the amphitheater, others who hadn't descended to the stage. "Let's go," he said.

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