

**Excerpt from**  
***Dark Mists of Ansalar: Forging The Bond***  
**by T.R.Chowdhury and T.M.Crim**

With narrowed eyes, Tallachienan watched from across the vast chamber as the dark-skinned, silver-haired drenna flirted with Trebexal. Ma-tia was beautiful to behold, just as exotic in her faelin form as she was in her dragon one. It seemed she had discovered some of the benefits of the faelin form; a sense as simple as that of touch was much more acute. The thick, scaly hide of a dragon simply didn't perceive the minute touches the thinner, more delicate faelin skin could sense. Not to mention, the texture was so much softer, and the lovemaking . . . well that depended upon one's partner.

Of course TC knew none of this first-hand, for he was not a dragon. Instead he had been Trebexal's trustworthy confidant for many years. His friend had explained the preference that many dragons had for their faelin forms during sexual contact, for the experience could be felt ten-fold. The only exception was during a pairing flight. During that auspicious time, a dragon doubtlessly wanted to keep his true form, and it was said that such a flight was one of the most intense unions that anyone could achieve.

TC's fingers clenched at the book he was holding when the sound of tinkling laughter floated through the air to reach his ears. Damnation, why couldn't Trebexal see what was so blatantly obvious? The drenna was just using him. To what end however, TC was uncertain. He could only imagine what it might be. Ma-tia was powerful, unpleasantly so. TC had witnessed her talent first-hand when he met her across the sparring arena a few fortnights ago. They had decided to call it a bligh no one won or lost and they were considered equals in battle. Ever since then, TC had ramped up his efforts, hoping to out-maneuver her in any contest in which they might participate in the future.

With most of his opponents, he harbored a much better attitude and could forge relationships born of mutual respect. Unfortunately he hated Ma-tia too much to bother with that.

Tolerating her proximity in silence, Tallachienan patiently waited. The two continued to speak for a while before Ma-tia turned to leave. The cloying scent of her perfume filled the air as she approached his location on her way out of the chamber. Without looking up from his book,

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he sensed the dark dreanna slowing to a stop before reaching him. A soft chuckle emanated from her throat, barely hinting at the malevolency she radiated. She spoke so quietly it made him wonder if Trebexal could hear.

"So, not only are you the devoted companion, but the loyal eavesdropper."

TC slowly looked up with an expression of disgust. "Definitely no worse than the brainless whore you make yourself out to be, my lady."

Ma-tia struggled to maintain her calm, but the signature flush over her face gave away her anger. "You had best tread lightly with me, Master Chroalthone. I am not someone you will want to meet on the opposing side one day."

TC raised a brow. "Really? I like to think I would love to see you at the receiving end of my most destructive spell." He cocked his head. "I know what you are doing. Trebexal is no fool; it's only a matter of time before he figures it out."

Ma-tia regarded him intently for a moment before turning her lips up into a smile, a wicked sparkle in her eyes. She lowered her voice even more, and he strained to hear what she said next. "By then it will be too late."

TC silently watched Ma-tia continue out of the chamber, her silvery-white hair trailing behind. He just sat there, the discarded book lying on the table beside the chair. Damnation, with just a handful of words she'd verified what he'd suspected all along. Trebexal was simply a pawn in whatever game she played, a tool she could use and then discard.

TC turned when he heard someone approaching from behind. Trebexal must have seen the residual expression of disgust on TC's face, and the dragon frowned. "You look as though you have seen an abomination."

TC nodded. "Yes, and she just left here several moments ago."

Trebexal pursed his lips. "What is it with you, Tallachienan? What is so wrong with my attempt to find someone with whom I can share my life?" he said defensively.

TC sighed. "I don't think it is sharing she wants, my friend."

"What are you trying to say?" Trebexal demanded.

"Ma-tia is not who you think she is."

Trebexal frowned. "How would you know that?"

"Unlike you, I have had the opportunity to simply watch. I have witnessed how she speaks with the other dragons, manipulating the truth in order to sway them to her nefarious

causes. She has ill intent towards human-kind, and she is rallying her army right now. She will pluck your supporters right from beneath your nose if you are not careful."

Trebexal stared at him for several moments. Then, "You are jealous."

TC drew his brows together into a frown. "What?"

"You are envious of my partnership with Ma-tia. You want so much to have someone for yourself that you can't think beyond to have a bit of happiness for me. I am so disappointed in you, Tallachienan."

TC felt his eyes widen as Trebexal proceeded to turn away from him, an indication that the conversation was over. TC swiftly reached out and caught Trebexal's wrist. "My friend, you can't seriously believe that."

"I do," he replied. "Our union would be momentous--her arcane strength combined with my political power could change the world!"

TC angrily rejected the wrist in his hand. "But for what goal?"

"Not what you are thinking!" Trebexal roared. "Humans are a nuisance, a pestilence almost, but never would I wish to eradicate them! Neither does Ma-tia. She simply dislikes them a bit more than the average dragon. But Hells, man! It doesn't mean she is shifting the loyalty of my dragons! Those drakes and drennas have faith in me and believe that I will lead them to a life in which daemon-kind has very little influence."

TC's gaze only hardened. "And I happen to know that Ma-tia has no interest in those goals. She cares naught for the battles between daemon and dragon. She cares only about the foothold that humans have developed within Shandahar, and she wants them gone! You are a fool, Trebexal, and I refuse to stand still for this."

TC rose from the chair, his mind roiling with perceived betrayal. He couldn't believe that Trebexal could allow it to happen. For the second time in his life, a woman was coming between him and a good friend. He felt a pang in his chest with the memory of Shire. The man was long gone a few hundred years ago, but Shire's memory remained. Now Trebexal was walking that same destructive path.

TC turned on his heel and left the cavern without looking back.

