



Warlord

Michelle West

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Novelette of 12k words.

Avandar Gallais is a domicis, and he has served Jewel ATerafin since she was sixteen. Long before he was a servant, he was known as The Warlord. He built and ruled empires--but there are reasons he chose a life of service. Those reasons are the core of this story, which takes place before and around the events of the novel House Name.

Warlord Details

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Estara says

Okay, if you read the House War series (and especially if you read the Sun Sword books) you'll have known a few of the turns in this short story, but it's still a nice glimpse at initial motivation for Avandar and Ellerson - this works for me ^^.

Phaedra says

I surprised myself by liking Avandar in the Sun Sword books because I thoroughly dislike Jewel. I expected to dislike anyone or anything that went along with her. Yet Avandar was just so darn interesting with his mysterious background and his ability to annoy Jewel even though he, nominally, served her. I was worried this short story would tarnish some of his mystique, that hidden quality that makes him so interesting. However, while this fleshed some things out and made Avandar slightly more approachable as a character, it still kept him strange and apart. I find that I still want to know more about his story.

Amélie says

I read House Name and Hunter Death first, so I was able to compare the difference in Avandar and Jewel's meeting between the three. I enjoyed having Avandar POV and being able to understand why he would choose to serve another. I found his behavior with the domicis (Ellerson in particular) amusing and I liked seeing his opinion of Jewel.

Caroline Mersey says

I have a really complicated relationship with bad boys in fiction. It's a very problematic trope. There is something deeply unhealthy about the idea of a man who behaves abominably but is somehow redeemed by the love of a fairly ordinary girl next door type and completely changes his way. It's a fantasy in the truest sense, and a dangerous one at that. It teaches women that a man who might be emotionally or physically abusive is somehow to be desired. But, oh, how I (not-so) secretly love a bad boy myself. I even downloaded iBooks just so I could read this short story.

Michelle West always does bad boys well, and Avandar is the best of them all. But there are reasons Avandar works as a character I can be comfortable with when so many others don't.

Crucially, West places him with Jay. Although Jay has her flaws and we see her grow and change through the various stories set in the Essalieyan Empire, she is undeniably a woman of power and consequence in her own right. She is no girl next door. Over time she becomes Avandar's equal. He has no small part in shaping her into that woman of power, but Jay is independent-minded enough that she stands up to him in her own right from their first meeting.

Another author might be tempted to go straight into setting up an obvious and predictable romantic relationship between them. Although West skirts round that, Jay remains unusually asexual as a character. In some ways that makes their relationship as lord and domicis far more intimate and much more powerful.

And finally, West pulls no punches about just how messed up Avandar is. Fiercely capable, very protective and frighteningly intelligent, yes, but also deeply flawed. In this short story we see the tragedy, the grief and the darkness inside him, as well as the arrogance. All of those are not only set out here, but shown to us with a level of unstinting brutalism throughout *The Sun Sword* that is unusual. What is drawn out here in particular is Avandar's desire to die, and his commitment to do whatever he can to end the curse.

But one of the founding rules of Jay's den is that the past doesn't matter. What matters is what we do now with the chance we have been given. And perhaps even someone like Avandar deserves a chance at redemption. Or at least that's how I justify this guilty fondness for the Warlord himself.

Aildiin says

Pretty good.

Good enough actually to make me want to catch up with Michelle West latest work (I had read the *Sunsword* when it came out a while back) .

So House War, here I come!!!

Cindy says

Probably won't have any impact on anyone who didn't read the *Sun Sword* books (or the *House Wars* books), but as a long-time West fan, I couldn't resist a re-read when I found my old copy of *Battle Magic*, a compilation of short stories where Warlord was originally published.

I am so very fond of Avandar. He is insufferable at times, but when the twist in his character is revealed in the *Sun Sword*, I had chills for days. This provides more backstory and shows the journey someone so unsuited to service had to take to end up a domicis. I was pleased with the subtexty undercurrent near the end. :)

Cheryl says

Finally, an explanation of why Avandar would choose to serve.
