



**Start reading A Year And A Day in serial format. Serial will be posted on Fridays beginning November 4, 2016.**

**Check in next Friday for the next chapter of A Year And A Day.**

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### ***Chapter 1 - Options Of Survival***

*Spring 250 A.C. (After Colonization) Clan Meeting @ Glass Castle*

THE EXECUTIVE ruling body of Clan O'Teague occupied the council chamber of the Clan's main seat, known as the Glass Castle, on the Southern coast of Glass Isle in the Dragon Sea. There should have been four women and two men, but the two male members had joined the military forces drafted by the Confederation and been killed in action on a distant planet. Their heirs were both too young to serve, and no one had yet been elected to take their places.

Lady Genevieve, the Laird of Clan O'Teague was young for the office. She was in her early thirties, with fiery red hair, large almond shaped grey eyes and a tall, slim build. Despite her age and appearance, during the attack Genevieve had demonstrated both the leadership and strength required to be the Laird.

It could easily be seen her by their coloring that the other three women seated around the table were related to her. The three varied in age from sixteen to around forty-five. Lady Corinne was the oldest of the three, and her red hair was beginning to show white amid the auburn. Her short, clipped nails drummed a tattoo on the table as she considered the solution her First Daughter, Lady Katherine, was proposing. Lady Corinne was

Katherine's aunt, and as the designated heir to her property, Katherine had taken over her place as the Clan Representative on the National Parliament when Corinne retired to pursue her interest in writing a planetary history. Katherine's hair was not quite so fiery a color as Genevieve's and her eyes had more green than grey, but she shared the same slim build, although she was shorter than her sister. Sixteen-year-old Lady Drusilla had only just begun to take her seat on the Decision-making Council and she was clearly uncomfortable with her new duties. Her pixie cut hair, a much darker red than either of her sisters, gleamed dully in the muted light from the crystal powered wall sconces, and her eyes were so dark a grey they almost appeared black. Drusilla was tiny; she was half a head shorter than Katherine and only came up to Genevieve's shoulders. She cuddled her agitated Quirka and glanced nervously from one sister to the other.

All four women were attended by Quirkas, the small native pets adopted by most of the settlers. Quirkas most closely resembled an Old Earth Squirrel with the pricked ears and pointed muzzle of a fox; they were furred with a large, bushy tail and front paws that looked like human hands. Soft flexible quills that could be ejected for defense ran along the backbone up to the top of the head. When attacked, the quills would stiffen and sharp, poison-tipped retractable barbs appeared. The poison couldn't kill anything as large as a human, but it could make one quite sick. Quirkas were chameleons; their body colors could change with their environment, but their natural color seemed to be a soft mottled yellow. They were empathic and developed life-long friendships with some humans. Their small size (about the size of a human hand) made them ideal house pets and vermin hunters. They mostly hunted the variety of small rodents and insects prone to infest homes and businesses.

"You're going to put the cat-fox in the hen house with this one girl," Corinne remarked with just a hint of a laugh. "I think I'll come to the next

Parliament just to watch the fur fly!”

“I think it’s a horrible idea,” Drusilla announced. “It’s so cold, letting a—a—program pick your husband! What about love? Don’t you want that?”

“I know it sounds cold, Honey,” Katherine said. “And yes, I want my husband to love me just as much as I want to love him, but this is a viable solution to our problem. If we don’t do something, this planet will be unpopulated in just three generations. It’s a fact but if we want to preserve our way of life, we need fresh DNA sources. Another fact that actually works in our favor is there will be many male soldiers left homeless because their worlds were burnt off in the War. We have to make difficult decisions—”

“Don’t make a campaign speech for Heaven’s sake!” Genevieve protested. “I agree we have to do something, and this sounds like a practicable solution, providing the issues I see can be worked out.”

“What issues?” Drusilla finally found her voice.

“The most important one is the Issue that we will be inviting grown men to become a part of our culture. Adult males who won’t have been raised with our traditions. Issue two is these will be men who are used to fighting and may be not readily accept our traditions—”

“That’s why you’ve been working on that old emigration selection program, ” began Corinne.

“A program! For what, pray tell? Please don’t say you’re talking about that crap the Makers use to set up marriage matches?” demanded Genevieve. Her Quirka chattered anxiously and she stroked her back, growing visibly calmer as she did so.

Katherine put two fingers in her mouth and gave a loud whistle. “Time!”

Everyone turned to look at her. “If I could be allowed to finish? As far as your first two objections go, yes, there is still a program for selecting emigrants. We haven’t used it since the first ships, but I do have a copy. The

program was designed to analyze genetic data and personality traits to weed out anyone who was unsuitable for our culture. We do use a part of it in our Matchmaking system. Once we received the results of the bio-weapon used on us, I realized what would need to be done. I have spent the last year working on combining the two programs and I plan to offer them to any clan that wants them. Who knows Genevieve? Since I did make some improvements to give more weight to personal compatibility, maybe we'll get lucky and our dream man will be waiting for us on Fenris."

Katherine smiled reassuringly at her younger sister. "It isn't really that much different than the match lists given out by the Makers when we turn of age you know, and we already do that during the Spring and Fall Festivals each year. The couples just won't have had an opportunity to meet each other beforehand. I think we can sell it to our young women if we put it out to them as being romantic, instead of a cold business proposition."

Genevieve pointed a finger at her sister. "Alright Politician, write this up in a speech I can present to the Clan for acceptance."

Drusilla hadn't given up. "Why would any of these ex-military types choose to come here? And where will you find them?" Drusilla asked.

"They'll come because we will be offering them a home to come back to. We were hit with a bio weapon but our world is still intact. A number of planets weren't so fortunate. Soldiers from those planets will need to find a new home. As to where they can be found, I intend to present this plan for accepting immigrants to the base commander on Fenris. Fenris was the staging area where most of the troop ships from this area departed. I'm sure he will cooperate in presenting our proposal, because he will appreciate the idea that he could get rid of some loose cannons by sending them home with us. You see Fenris is where they are going to turn loose most of the military units who no longer have a planet to return to. Even if the base commander is reluctant, the planetary government won't be. Housing thousands of ex-

soldiers and finding work for them will mean a big drain on planetary resources if they stay.”

“You’re going to need money to operate. We used to do a lot of trade with Fenris,” Corinne said thoughtfully. “Might be a good idea to take along some trade goods to build up capital and rebuild relations. I think I’ll go with you.”

Genevieve jumped to her feet. “Go with her? Then who’s going to sit in Parliament?”

“You are,” Katherine retorted.

“You are talking at least six weeks to get there and the same to get back! Not including the time spent on the planet setting this up. I can’t be away from our lands that long.”

“Sure you can. Parliament only sits three times a year. You name Drusilla as your deputy—”

“Me!” squeaked Drusilla.

“Yes, you,” Katherine replied. “Genevieve will be reachable for advice by message crystal. It has to be you in Parliament Genevieve; Drusilla is too inexperienced to deal with that den of vixens.”

Genevieve sat back down heavily. “Oh, God. I hate politics!”

Katherine nodded briskly. “Now that’s been settled, here is what I propose we offer our new Handfasting partners; full clan rights, that is they can hold property for any daughters until the daughter reaches majority. If no daughter is born, they will have lifetime privileges on the property they occupy. Sons of course will automatically be full clan members; the woman those sons marry will become holders. We will also guarantee pension and dowry rights if they choose to marry into another clan after the Handfasting period. Because we need to develop a viable population base as soon as possible, I would prefer to approach a single unit from the same area; I think it will be easier to integrate them into the clan as a group. That way if

there are older men in the group who don't find a match or unit members who don't want to be matched, they would receive the same benefits as those who do, and they would be available to supply sperm for the planetary banks. The other Clans will of course design their appeal as they see fit. The only thing I plan to bring up before the Parliament next week is the fact that the program is available and that we intend to offer the Year and A Day Handfasting to these men."

"What if your matching programs works so well the couples want to change the handfasting to the Forever and A Day?" inquired Corinne.

"Then that will be up to each couple," Katherine said firmly. "Not our business."

Drusilla took a deep breath and then asked, "Okay, but what are we going to tell them about us?"

Her sisters and aunt just looked at her. "What are you talking about?" Genevieve finally asked.

"You know very well what I'm talking about," Drusilla said doggedly.

"I don't see why that would be an issue," Katherine said finally. "There have been rumors about Vensoog people and our 'special abilities' for years. It has always been up to each person as to what or how much she or he wants to tell spouses who come from off planet."

"Most visitors to Vensoog simply conclude that some of us have psychic abilities and let it go at that," Corrine reminded her.

"She does have a point," Genevieve observed. "These men won't be visitors. They will be living here with us. Eventually they're bound to get our talents rubbed in their face. You're going to have to be careful not to let any religious fanatics who might want to burn witches past your screening."

"Are you seriously suggesting I go to Fenris and invite battle hardened troops to come back with me to marry a witch?" inquired Katherine. "That is not the approach I plan to make and I doubt I will be alone in that. Can you

see Clan Yang or Clan Caldwell or DeMedici doing that?"

"Are you going to lie if they ask you about it?" Drusilla insisted.

Katherine sighed. Sometimes her little sister reminded her of a Quirka at a vermin hole. "No, of course not. While I certainly won't advertise our abilities, if I am asked I will absolutely tell them the truth. However, since time will be so short before we leave for home, our new clan members will need to do a lot of sleep learning to familiarize themselves with our customs and the dangers of the planet itself. I did include acceptance of our ways into the subliminal programs about the planet, so I hope the issue won't arise."

Once assured that Katherine and Genevieve were going to be included in the list of marriageable women who would be handfasted, about a hundred unmarried women of Clan O'Teague between the ages of twenty and thirty-five volunteered for the plan and begin entering the answers to questions that would determine personality compatibilities for matchmaking into Katherine's database.

No better solution having been offered, the Vensoog Parliament had also adopted Katherine's proposal, but as she had prophesied not with a whole heart. Several of the Clans were adamant about making their own provisions for dealing with the immigrants, but they had all accepted Katherine's computer matching program. It was finally agreed that each of the Clans would send their own representative to Fenris or other planets hosting displaced Terrans. The Clans of O'Teague, Yang and DeMedici agreed to make a proposal to the Fenris Base commander together as a unit, but each clan representative would be making independent choices for acceptance of various immigrants.

On the day of departure, Katherine, Corrine and representatives from DeMedici Clan and Yang Clan took ship for the planet Fenris on a recently decommissioned freighter that had been used as a military supply ship

during the war. Now that the war had ended, spaceships and crews that had been commandeered from civilian sources were being returned to their original owners. The Spaceman's Dream had originally been a free trader and was glad to take on cargo and passengers in return for a percentage of the profit on the sale of the luxury goods that had been stored on Vensoog for the duration of the war. Only three of the ten clans had decided to make their approach to the homeless soldiers on neighboring Fenris. Of the others, four had decided to approach civilian refugees on the planets of N'Jamacia and Camelot, and the remaining three had simply agreed to take new applications from the Federated Worlds immigration services.