



***The Handfasting*** is an epic tale of a family's struggle to survive on an alien planet. In Book 1 – ***A Year And A Day***, A witch from the right side of the tracks finds herself paired with a hard-bitten soldier handpicked by a computer program. In Book 2 – ***Forever And A Day***, a marriage of convenience between two determined, strong-willed people sparks a planetary war and puts at risk everyone they love. In book 3 - ***All Our Tomorrows***, A warrior/priestess teams up with a Bard from another world and genetically created children to defeat a deadly enemy and save their planet from destruction. In Book 4 ***From This Day Forward*** – When she finds the body of a retired shopkeeper on the beach, a series of mysterious events draw the new owner into a web of passion, terror and murder. She must find the killer and discover what he wants before he gets her too. **(still in production. Expected release date April 2017)**

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***Chapter 15 - New Beginnings***

CORA insisted that Katherine remain in bed to recover from her leg wound. Once her children and all the extended clan had walked through her room in the infirmary to make sure she would live, Zack ran everyone out and shut the door.

Katherine looked him over. "Well, you look as though you didn't even get a scratch," she observed.

"That's because *I* know what I'm doing," he retorted. "What in the Hell is wrong with you — taking on a combat-trained veteran in a knife fight? I nearly had a heart attack when I realized what was going on. I knew I was too far away to help you."

"She was going after Juliette. Did you think I would stand for that?"

"Why didn't you shoot her? You had a gun, and I know you can hit what you aim at."

She looked at him a little sheepishly and said, "I'm sorry, I guess I was just so angry—"

"I think we made a mistake in the Handfasting Ceremony," he remarked off the cuff.

"What?" she cried.

"Yes," he continued. "We should have done the Forever and a Day one, not the Year and A Day. It's obvious you need a keeper and I'm elected."

Katherine gave a gasp of relief. "Damn you Zack, what did you scare me like that for?"

He smiled sweetly at her. "Payback's a bitch isn't it?"

Katherine threw her pillow at him.

### ***Historical Notes***

WHEN opened for colonization, the Founders considered themselves fortunate because Vensoog was a semi-tropical paradise. The Islands of various sizes connected by water channels (although of a slightly higher saline content than oceans on Old Earth) were strung around the equator between five larger landmasses. Two ice-covered regions were found at each of the magnetic poles.

Every year the Islands and the five semi-continents were subject to swarms of insects that pollinated the entire planet. The double moons in a close orbit created heavy tide surges during the storm season that followed the swarms and cleared out the insect population. Abundant mammalian and avian life populated the planet; a variety of edible fish lived in the sea. The planet boasted several species of mammals the settlers dubbed Nessies and Sandies or Water/Sand Dragons because of their resemblance to the fabled mythical beasts of old earth. Some of the native species were found to be slightly empathic with chameleon abilities; the Water/Sand Dragons. The settlers dubbed a small empathic and chameleon-like vermin predator Quirkas. Because the Quirkas were small, cute, and soon seen to bond with humans, they were quickly adopted as pets. They proved adept at hunting the varieties of small vermin and insects that infested homes and

animal enclosures. There was a variety of furred mammalian flyers bearing a resemblance the Old Earth Legends of the Pterodactyls. These Dactyls shared the mildly empathic and chameleon characteristics of the Sandies and Quirkas. Dactyls were found in all sizes from large enough to prey on the Nessies to small enough to fit in a human hand.

The temperate climate of the islands was hospitable to both man and the animals the settlers brought with them to suit their agrarian lifestyle. A spaceport was developed on an island next to the largest continent. Unfortunately, the settlers had copied other spaceport designs without taking into consideration Vensoog's weather. The high winds generated by the first storms toppled the Space control tower and the settlers were forced to rebuild, wisely adopting a dome architecture style for the remaining buildings. The new colonists settled first on the Islands closest to the spaceport for convenient access to the supplies being brought in and had started spreading out onto the major continents when the Karamine Wars had broken out.

The society the colonists created was one of the social experiments designed on Old Earth after the last planetary war when space exploration had become cheap because of the discovery of an efficient faster than light drive. It had become easy to colonize a planet and carry on sociological theories undisturbed by conflicting viewpoints. All it took to develop a colony was enough money to register a claim to a planet with the Confederated Worlds and buy ships and supplies to launch out into space with like-minded colonists.

Vensoog's founding colonists had been led by a cadre of wealthy women who decided the male-controlled society governing most of the Old Earth caused most of the wars that continually afflicted it. Recognizing the struggles for power had produced most of the strife in the past, the colonists theorized that changing how political power was handled would change how

society reacted to resolving conflict. The colonists blamed the breakdown of the extended family on a lack of responsibility felt by both men and women for the children they created. To counter-act these influences, they designed a planetary government loosely based on clan structures copied from Old Earth with a ruling parliamentary body made up of representatives from each clan, with provision for additional seats to be created as the need occurred. Inheritance of titles, ruling offices and property would descend through female lines instead of the male.

Recognizing the need for planetary cooperation, representatives from each clan met several times a year to make major decisions concerning planetary welfare. This body regulated laws in areas outside of immediate clan control, such as River and Ocean navigation or joint Clan ventures. Since the clans all came from different ethnic groups and ancestry on Old Earth, they each had different ideas of how they wanted their clan to be run. It was agreed that inside their own jurisdiction, each clan was free to set up different sets of laws to reflect their ancestral traditions, providing those laws adhered to the principles set down by the colony designers.

The discovery of valuable deposits of Azorite crystal power stones on Vensoog became highly prized as an export and made possible many of the non-mechanical solutions to the difficulties facing the new colony.

The group of "wise use" ecologists who colonized Vensoog preferred non-technical or non/industrial solutions to planetary problems but they were not averse to using gene manipulation to achieve the "non-mechanical" effects they wanted. Many times they genetically enhanced abilities already found in the domestic animals and plants they brought with them from Old Earth to suit their needs.

The Clan based culture was supposed to provide a stopgap when individuals fell through the cracks of society. The founders reasoned there would be less violence if everyone felt they had a place in the social order,

and the loose makeup of a clan would provide room for individuals who wanted to improve their lot in life or move up the social scale. It had been determined that a factor causing trouble in the past was the power holders (males) wanted to ensure their families kept what had been earned, but they had no real way of guaranteeing it was their own descendants who inherited since they could not be sure if their progeny really belonged to them. A woman would always know to whom she gave birth. Vensoog was not a true matriarchy (men were allowed hold positions of power, but could not pass along those positions or property except through their daughters). Allowance was made for those individuals who didn't want to join a clan; they fell under the authority of the clan's joint Security Council.

To make sure their plan for establishing a society was not tampered with, rigorous psychological testing had been given to the original prospective colonists to certify they would be flexible enough to adapt to the new power structure. Additionally during the voyage, the new colonists were subjected to sleep training and mental manipulation to accustom them to accept the changes.

The prospective colonists, had been tested for "special talents" and high aptitudes with psychic gifts. The overt reason was allegedly that greater empathy should encourage group consensus. A covert reason was several of the clan bloodlines had always had the talent to perform what could have been termed "magic" by uninformed persons.

The founders were mistaken on several assumptions. The theory that greater empathy would provide group harmony had not proven out. While inbreeding had produced high levels of certain types of psychic ability, it had not improved either communication or willingness to heal areas of disagreement. Human women were just as susceptible to jealousy, envy and downright cussedness as were human men.

The Karamine wars between the Confederated Worlds of which Vensoog

was a member, and another star-faring race with whom humans had come into conflict, wreaked havoc on both sides. It left some planets in radioactive ruins and others devastated by Bio-genetic weapons. Economic disaster, starvation and anarchy now stared many planets in the face. After nearly fifteen years of sustained warfare, the humans and their allies finally pieced together a truce of sorts. The truce came about because both sides had used up so much resources they could barely feed their populations and maintain communication within their sphere of influence. In the Confederated Planets, outlying planets like Vensoog now fought off onslaughts from pirates who preyed on them using captured ships, and subsisted on meager alliances with the few Free Traders who had held aloof from the conflict.

Unless it had strategic importance or resources, The Karaminetes policy was to use atomics to burn off a planet opposing them. On planets they deemed too valuable to destroy, biogenetic weapons were employed. The Karaminetes noticed the large deposits of the valuable mineral Azorite that Vensoog had in abundance so instead of using atomics, they attacked it with a devastating bio virus. On planets they didn't burn off, the Karaminetes used conquered native populations as slaves. A study of human societies had convinced the Karamine Legion that in human society the males were traditionally the most rebellious so the Bio-weapon used on Vensoog targeted males. As a result, all the men and boys on the planet who didn't die outright from the virus were rendered sterile. The virus had no effect on the female reproductive system since the Karamines planned on harvesting ova from captured females and creating more women slaves.

Happily, the virus had a very short life span and dissipated after a few months, which would have allowed the Karaminetes to settle on Vensoog themselves in time.

Fortunately for the colonists, the truce was declared before the

Karaminetes took possession of the planet. Although no more bio-genetic attacks would come, the colony was still in deep trouble. The reserves of viable sperm from the lower mammals brought along for colonization and periodically replenished by the colonists, had been protected in the freezers at the original landing site. Unfortunately, in the two hundred years after making landing, to ensure the colony remained biologically diverse the Vensoog colonists had used all the frozen human eggs and sperm they had brought with them. With no new children being born, the colony faced extinction. The planet's population would die out within three generations, unless something could be done to re-introduce new viable human sperm to allow more children to be born. Each of the clans worked frantically to come up with a solution.

After studying the political and physical mess left by the war, Lady Katherine O'Teague had come up with a plan to restore biological diversity among Vensoog's human population. She concluded new male colonists were needed. The best candidates for new colonists would probably be found among returning soldiers. In theory, the Confederated Worlds military force was composed equally of men and women, but, most those choosing a career as soldiers were still male, and the men whose worlds had been destroyed would need new homes. While Vensoog wasn't the only planet to suffer from the bio-bomb virus, thousands of people had been left homeless when planets been burned off.

The Clans agreed to present proposals adopting the displaced soldiers in their sector of space to military commanders. Vensoog would accept new immigrants providing anyone who applied could pass the immigration screening and was willing to either take part in a temporary Handfasting agreement with suitable Vensoog women or was willing to provide genetic material. Clan representatives traveled to Fenris, Camelot, and Avalon where many of the returning soldiers would be decommissioned. After the first

wave of ex-soldiers had been assimilated on Vensoog, the clans had agreed the screening program would remain in place on Fenris and the other planets for other potential new immigrants to use. A joint clan undertaking with Vensoog volunteers from each clan willing to take up temporary residence on these planets would have to be found to administer the screening programs.