

## Introduction to *Changing Vision*

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Welcome! I hope you don't mind, but when peanutpress.com and DAW Books opened the door to my adding introductions to the electronic editions, they may have created a monster. These are such fun to write I now find myself introducing books that aren't even out yet. Such as *Changing Vision*.

I realize introductions are supposed to precede a book, but this is a special case. Until now, my peanutpress.com introductions followed the paperback and hardcover editions by sufficient time to allow me to find out how those books were received. So, when writing other introductions, I had questions to answer, puzzles to unravel, and comments needing some type of response from me. That's not to say I'm at a loss what to say here, but I think it's time I explained something about the fun process of writing these introductions.

It's terrifying.

Why? For these introductions to be of any significance, I feel they should reveal something of what is behind each story. Since that would be me, some of the things I reveal are, to put it mildly, things I've kept private. This is, in part, quite sensible, because a writer's craft involves various mind-numbing details of interest only to other writers. Don't worry. I do try to save those details for writing workshops, rather than book introductions. The main reason for wanting privacy is simply that, unless you enjoy running around naked before strangers, it's scary enough to expose your innermost self through storytelling without risking more. Whenever I'm tempted to keep a safe distance from my work, I glance at a quote from J. Michael Straczynski I've had taped to my desk long enough to fade from the sun: "Courage is the writer's main virtue."

Despite this underlying fear of exposure, I have come to realize that many readers enjoy knowing something of the author, gaining a deeper appreciation for the story itself in the process. I've experienced this myself when reading books by authors who are friends, including catching some intended -- and unintended -- humor. Perhaps knowing what I bring to a particular story may add to its enjoyment for you. What's a little moment of terror against that?

So, embarrassing as it is, I'd like to introduce *Changing Vision* with a very personal confession. I consider friendship to be one of the most important bonds between two individuals. My wonderful husband Roger is also my best friend. Despite moving innumerable times -- to the point where family members record my address in pencil -- I have several other dear friendships stretching intact almost four decades. I may see these individuals annually or less, but each time we are together, it's as if no time has passed at all. Common minds; common hearts.

What, you may wonder, does this have to do with a science fiction novel -- in fact, a science fiction series -- about an well-meaning, accident-prone, adolescent, semi-immortal shapeshifter named Esen-alit-Quar? It has everything to do with it, since this book and its prequel, *Beholder's Eye*, chronicle the first friendship between Esen's kind, called the Web, and humanity.

I postulated that, although these beings have shared the same area of space for millennia, the Web have existed in complete secrecy – somewhat easy to do when there are only six of you and you can modify your body into a genetically perfect match to any other intelligent life form. Thus, this expands a story of friendship into a story of first contact; first contact, with all that implies about doing well from the beginning, or setting dangerous and unfortunate precedents in motion to mar the relationship from the start.

I chose to examine the potential of friendship as a bond between aliens, to see if the growth of loyalty, affection, and understanding between two very dissimilar beings could extend to a broader canvas, influencing the future of their respective species. Friendship was a startling new concept to the Web as I'd designed them, a mix of dangerous vulnerability with the powerful lure of satisfying curiosity. Its mechanics weren't too difficult, since, for Esen, friendship wasn't so different from the tight social connections customary within the Web, with the somewhat impractical exception of consuming each other's flesh. It was, however, a significant risk to the human, Paul Ragem, who offered friendship to such a totally alien and powerful being, a risk including the potential for betrayal on every side, by all sides.

In *Changing Vision*, without spoiling the story for you, Esen and Paul's new friendship is tested by just such betrayals. There are life and death decisions to be made based, not on a cold analysis of cost or benefit, but on the depth of trust and responsibility between friends. In our society, life or death decisions arrive usually in the medical care of family members, or in the aftermath of accident. We rarely have to suddenly ask ourselves, what would I risk for a friend? Yet I firmly believe that true friends, in life or death situations, sacrifice for one another without qualm, that friendship is the fundamental cornerstone of human society.

Not everyone would agree with me. I received a letter from a reader quite a while ago, which kindly praised *Beholder's Eye* effusively, but concluded with the statement: "I don't see how you can expect me to believe he'd do all this out of friendship. There's nothing in it for him." It wasn't something I could answer, if the reader didn't already know that there is, of course, only one return for friendship – friendship itself.

At the beginning of this introduction, I mentioned I was writing it before *Changing Vision* is released to the public: an odd feeling, since I can't respond to your comments about the book or even guess what you or other readers will think of it. I hope you will enjoy it. I certainly hope you will believe in the depth of friendship I've created between these two characters and what friends will risk for one another.

I know I do.