

Introduction to *Ties of Power*
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Greetings and welcome to the electronic edition of *Ties of Power*. Thanks to the kind folks at PeanutPress, I'm able to add a bit more to a book that came out more than a bit longer than I'd expected.

Why? Well, that's one of the interesting things about a sequel, especially when trying to ensure everything in it makes sense to someone who might not have read the preceding book, *A Thousand Words for Stranger*. I had two reasons for this. First, as a relatively new author, I couldn't count on copies of *Thousand* being in most stores. Mind you, it was and still appears to be, but that wasn't something I took for granted. Second, I prefer books that contain a complete story of themselves, whether related to other books or not. As a result, while my brain apparently likes to plot stories around 400 pages in length, the inclusion of necessary backstory in *Ties* dropped in another 100 or so pages.

Don't get me wrong. It was fun. Like many writers, I keep folders bulging with strange ideas and nifty tidbits as yet unused. *Ties* was permission to drag them all out and see what still intrigued me. Needless to say, many belonged in the folders. Enough stayed out to give me interesting new things to offer about familiar characters and quite a bit to say about the Drapsk, the aliens introduced in *Ties*.

I've been asked how I design my aliens. In most cases, I want an intelligent living thing whose form and/or behaviour suits either what I want them to do in the story or makes a story point all by itself. For the Drapsk, I wanted a form which communicated in a way other species couldn't detect, so I went with olfaction. This also worked for what I wanted the Drapsk to represent: a group of intelligent, knowing beings to whom teamwork was as natural and inevitable as breathing.

I'm as surprised as the next person when something philosophical appears in my writing. I don't do it on purpose, unless it is within the biological "what if's" I enjoy. But as much as *A Thousand Words for Stranger* was about discovering in oneself the capacity to care for another, *Ties of Power* is about learning to care for one's kind. In Sira, the main character, I'd created a person and a culture in which mutual respect and/or fear were the sole coin of social interaction. In *Thousand*, I had her learn and adapt to friendship, trust, and affection. In *Ties*, it was time for Sira to reach further, to face the consequences of her actions and existence on others of her species. By allying the independent Sira with the Drapsk, accustomed to living and working in huge tribal units, I was able to contrast their two approaches to life and give Sira's character a chance to grow.

Not that I allowed this growth process to go smoothly. The social collisions and misunderstandings between Sira and the Drapsk proved simply delightful. I was very pleased when a reader wrote to me that he, like Sira, completely underestimated the Drapsk at first because they were so hilarious.

Ties of Power also let me repay a debt, although not in the usual sense. The character of Jason Morgan appeared fully formed in *Thousand*, with only vague hints of his past or capabilities. It wasn't because I didn't know those things, but rather that I'd known him in my own stories so long, I was guilty of overlooking the needs of readers to know those things as well. So out came the folder marked "Morgan." I found the moments where I peeled away some of his mysterious past to be particularly satisfying.

There were two other moments I found remarkable to write and that's because they were intensely personal. You'll recognize them, I believe, if I tell you that I live where there's no sound as haunting as a loon at sunrise and, among my eclectic array of talents, I can call an offside before the whistle.

Welcome to my worlds.