

Introduction to *A Thousand Words for Stranger*  
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Welcome to the first electronic edition of my debut novel. One of the bonuses about this e-edition is being able to jump in and talk to you without asking the typesetters and printers to go back to the drawing board. I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to answer some questions I've had from readers since *Thousand* hit the stands, and say some things about this book I've never said before.

If you are trying my work for the first time, my sincere and heartfelt thanks. One of the most amazing things of being a new author is that people are willing to take a chance on you. I hope you enjoy what I'd done. If you are returning to me because you've tried and liked my work, my equally sincere gratitude. Welcome.

Questions. I've heard a few over the last three years, including the ever-popular "where's the washroom?" posed by most people at booksignings. (And the unexpected "where's my husband?" which I've puzzled over on several occasions.) Readers' questions vary from story details to those about the craft of writing, but there are some which seem of general interest.

Where did the idea for this story start? In a very cold room, namely a refrigerated basement laboratory beneath the University of Saskatchewan. I was studying the reproductive behaviour of a chubby little minnow with a particular interest in whether it used chemicals to attract its mates and deter rivals. The whole issue of the link between a species' evolution and selection based on behaviour fascinated me then and now. I'd been writing science fiction as a hobby for years and this idea worked its way into the "what if?" that formed the core of *Thousand* and lead to my subsequent novels about the aliens called the Clan (The Trade Pact Universe). What if, I wondered, an intelligent species was faced by some conflict between its instinctive reproductive behaviour and its very survival? What would members of this species do?

The great thing about science fiction is its power to speculate. I could create such a intelligent species. I could set up a struggle in which something of immense value to members of this species, something in themselves, was inextricably bound to a competitive reproductive instinct. What would happen to their interactions, their culture, to how they fit with other species? What would they do, when they realized they had gone as far as their biology would allow?

So, without revealing too much more, that's where I started *Thousand*. Since I was writing for my own entertainment, I set the story in the future I love to imagine: a wide-open galaxy, with faster-than-light travel and aliens everywhere one turns. I've been asked how I decided on the characters. It's important to me to have the problems in a story faced by characters I care about. The pivotal character, Sira, had to be someone at the center of the crisis facing the Clan. I also wanted her to be capable of reaching for solutions beyond what had been contemplated, so she was

the one who saw the strange and new, who responded to wonder. That wonder is what I always seek in my science fiction and in my science. Other characters fell into place around her, some with natures and goals opposed to Sira's, some who came to be on the same side. And one who is a tribute to the charmingly outspoken, gourmet-cooking father of a dear friend.

The other question I'm asked is when or how I made the move from writing for myself to having a book on the shelf, virtual or otherwise. I can blame others. I'd made a career switch from biologist to textbook author, and my non-fiction publisher thought it was obvious I should send my fiction out. My husband and other friends encouraged this happy lunacy, so eventually I tidied up my selfish story-telling and entered the world of the slush pile. Suffice it to say that while my journey upwards through the pile was not swift, the support and enthusiasm I met on the way made it much easier to be patient. And I was still writing for my own fun. The end result has definitely been worth every minute.

What else can I say about this book I haven't said before? Being an ambitious writer, I hope *A Thousand Words for Stranger* turns out to be my worst book, at least in terms of my skills as a storyteller. I'm only satisfied when I see myself improving. Maybe that's why I enjoy writing (and reading) about characters who reach for the best in themselves, who may or may not be powerful, but who care and strive when it counts.

And if you glimpse something a little wonderstruck in my stories, that's a glimpse of me, too.