

EXCERPTS FROM
SPIDER SILK & SHOALS IN TIME



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Excerpt from Spider Silk (sequel to Embers)

From the Prologue: The Arms of Rodhán'is

Yethirán Táren looked over the glass-calm waters of the cove. Her joints ached, not fooled by the false gentleness of late fall. Winter was coming. Should she go through another season of tiny humiliations, cutting into her like grass edges? Or should she walk into the beguiling embrace in front of her, give herself over to the lull of the sea swells? She would do it correctly, leave her clothes laid out to form her shape on the shore. A full life she had had, and a good one... except for the one patch of desolation, where no branch or flower would ever blossom.

A kadán swooped overhead, making the final loop for the landing. Shading her eyes with her hand, she saw the colors of her ádh'ri on it. She smiled – they could have sent a long-range transmission but he was too eager to be denied, the boy. Down the hill he pelted, white-faced with excitement.

“You are bidden to come to Oránis, tanegír,” he announced formally, bowing with all the seriousness of his sixteen summers. Then, tossing dignity to the eight winds, he exploded with his news. “Ádh'ri Sóran-Kerís has returned!”

“Are you sure, Edánir?” she asked sharply. *The captain's line, thought lost for nigh so many turns... is it possible?*

“As sure as the sun will set, grandmother,” he replied, kissing her hands. “From the Arms of Rodhán'is they came yestereve in a ship as haughty as a dehán, the Sóran-Kerís and his te'héyn...”

“A te'héyn, yet!” mused the old woman. Her pupils dilated as all the words registered. “Did you say, *his* te'héyn?”

“Aye,” said the youth, stumbling over his words in his hurry to tell all. “Tanegír Yehán has already invoked the exception clause on his behalf!”

Well, well, well... A male lineage carrier with an outlander te'héyn. The first such. Yethirán looked at the waters of the bay once again. Not today, last lover. Life has become interesting again.

Excerpt from Shoals in Time (sequel to Spider Silk)

From Chapter 1: The Parting of the Clouds

Nesil tegri Durath

The starship Ganshi, 5 standard years after the foundation of the Reaha Nuazkat

I swear I just closed my eyes when the buzzer jerks me upright – what in the blazes...

“On deck, Nesil,” the tones of the Big Noise drill my ear drums. “The Koredháni pilot came aboard, he wants to start right away.”

Well, and I want to be Kenir of Mashad. Let him wait. Then the *Ganshi* shifts gently but emphatically and my inner ear follows the motion before the rest of me. He’s really in a hurry! I can’t stand sharing astrogation, especially with someone who thinks they can do it better. Whom am I kidding, he’s really good – I felt no bump when he brought in his ship, nor the usual jump when the acceleration started. Cursing under my breath, I push my feet hurriedly into my boots and pelt down the corridor.

I burst into the bridge gathering myself to yell when I catch a glimpse of the pilot and my mouth goes dry. Why, he’s only a boy! He turns... half-smiles... and my diaphragm hits the floor. Indigo eyes that take up half his face, cheekbones you could impale yourself on and his body... His clothing, what there is of it, doesn’t leave much to the imagination. I’ve been cooped up with all these unappetizing slobs for almost one standard year, and I’m a woman in my prime, after all! Unruly thoughts stampede across my mind. I can hardly restrain myself from dipping my hands into that black mane that’s floating around him like river rapids.

I had heard tell of these people, but never really believed the stuff. I should have listened more closely. Better yet, looked at the holos more carefully. Two standard years ago, that was all you could find on the broadcasts: the glimmering ship that descended on Behtalka and the three apparitions that emerged from it, after the abortive attempt of the New Confederation to annihilate them. Everyone was paralyzed with fear. To this day, why they didn’t just take over the galaxy remains a complete mystery.

His smile gets more pronounced and I remind myself to exhale. Get hold of yourself, Nesil!

“How old are you?” I ask him bluntly. “In standard years!”

“He doesn’t speak Behtalkat,” interferes the B. N., who somehow managed to wiggle and squeeze into a crumpled uniform. When did he have time to put it on? Maybe he sleeps standing up, fully clothed. That would explain lots of things, including his winsome personality.

“Tells you what they think of our mission, if they sent a boy who doesn’t even speak the lingua franca!” I bring out, appalled. “We’ll find ourselves inside a sun or an asteroid, I cannot allow –”

“What do you mean, a boy?” he harrumphs. He’s even less thrilled about having a Koredháni aboard than I am, if that’s possible. But since the collapse of the Elkat-an jump point, we have no choice if we want to go over to their side in less than a lifetime. “He’s in his early forties. Handsome of course, as they all are in that weird way of theirs, but –”

“Are we seeing the same person?” I interrupt him. What is going on? Can we be sure he is who he says he is? This is not exactly an official mission we’re on, there are those who might want to stop us. I’m ship’s astrogator, if anything goes wrong –

“Dohéni, adh’irén-kerís, dhi tav’íri,” murmurs the Koredháni. Much deeper timbre than I expected, given his frame and age, and I hear... music? When he falls silent, calm descends on me, as if a hand brushed across my forehead, but he’s over there, how... Somehow, I know what he said. Feeling slightly stunned, I take the seat next to him.

“We’ll need the module for –” I start. He rests his hand, rough but warm, ever so lightly on mine. A waft of spices rises from his hair.

“Éri sírathen se kev’hán ynáris,” he says and gives my hand the tiniest of caresses. How dare he – he’d better leave his hand right there – what did I just think? As I try to read his hand, my nominal captain distracts me.

“He said he already installed it,” says the B. N. When was this? He must have been on the ship all of... I should never have allowed him on board. We are doomed, who ever heard of jumping blind?

“You are Niregan,” says the Koredháni softly. I blink. He speaks the ruling tegri Niregan dialect, at the low pitch calibrated for command. Only Tiarneth do that. “You are far from your home. Would you like to see mine? I will be pleased to take you, if you let me.” I sense another feathery stroke on my hand. I manage a quick, shallow read. Many that he loved died, and he almost died with two of them. I concentrate... he gently withdraws his hand and I feel a wisp of wind in the bridge.

“Where did you learn your Niregis?” I manage to bring out. He smiles again, and I feel a ripple through my plexus. What use am I this befuddled?

“One of my kinsmen is Niregan...” he answers. I’d heard the story but dismissed it as ridiculous. Apparently the Zogran’s sisterson sired a child on a Koredháni woman way back during the days of the Astal Nuazkat. Then he married into one of their hearths just before the collapse of the jump point. All of Nireg was agog with the rumors, they said she had two other husbands... and he was a firebreather, a Tohduat-trained warrior. He had obliterated his paternal tegri in revenge for the slaughter of his parents, you’d have thought he’d never tolerate such arrangements! But you know the saying – the bigger the planet, the likelier a comet hit. And if their women are anything like this boy...