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The World Before
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One of the challenges in writing a series that's one continuous story arc rather than a sequence of standalone plots is knowing how much backstory to include in each book. The arc begun in *City of Pearl* will take six books to complete — the fourth, *Matriarch*, is out next year - and *The World Before* is the halfway point. Not all the pieces are on the board yet, and the stakes are getting higher by the day. The scale of the disastrous events unleashed by the decisions of a few individuals has yet to become clear to those caught up in them.

In *The World Before*, I've kept the recapping to a minimum. Wess'har society is now undergoing its own culture shock after making contact with its original homeworld for the first time in millennia; the isenj are facing the reality of allying with humankind; and the humans stranded in the Cavanagh's Star system are caught up in a conflict largely of their own making. In theory, you should be able to start at any point in a series and understand what's going on. But the sheer volume of events in the wess'har wars and the impact they have on the lives of the characters makes dipping around fraught with spoilers.

People ask me why I embarked on such a long and complex arc with my first book. The honest answer is that's what it takes to tell the story: I like to look at the ultimate consequences of individual actions, and those can be a long time in the unravelling. I also like to examine the same situation from as many characters' viewpoints as I can, because reality is highly subjective - and it's the gulf between perceptions that create conflict.

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