

# Chapter One

“I’m bored,” said Cheobawn, the underage and provisional member of Blackwind Pack.

It was a travesty, her status. Injustice that only Mothers could mete out on their children. She was eight and had been eight since the middle of summer.

She spun the long knife on the palm of her hand one last time before flicking it across the dorm room. It came to rest, quivering, in the center of a target wired to the storage closet door. There were targets placed strategically around the Pack’s common room for just this purpose. Tam, her Alpha male, had thought it best to preserve the much-abused lintels and built-in cabinetry in Blackwind Pack’s dormitory suite from further damage. The previous generations had not been kind to their lumber.

Cheobawn ran her fingers unconsciously through her blond curls and glared at the white light streaming through the south windows. Winter had come to the

Highreaches, and with it came the bitter cold. No one was allowed out of the dome unless they had good reason to go. Sparring space was at a premium because everyone in the tribe was starting to get dome fever. The need to move, to run, to fight had infected the minds of everyone. She had not been able to reserve space in the sparring rooms until late in the day.

Part of her problems was she was called Cheobawn Windfall when, by rights she should have been called Cheobawn Blackwind. Mora, her Truemother stood like a wall between her and all she desired and because Mora was First Mother to Windfall dome and High Mother to all the domes, there was no higher authority she could go to to voice her grievances.

Cheobawn slouched across the common room and leaned over the back of Connor's chair, watching as he filled his third screen with what was proving to be a very long theoretical calculus problem.

Connor, Tam's Third, threw down his stylus. It bounced and rolled off the desk into the drifts of notes and wads of crumpled paper from his previous failed attempts at problem solving. When he ran out of screen space Connor had the bad habit of scratching his notes on whatever surface was handy. Megan had grown tired of cleaning math problems off the wall by the study station and gone down to the recycling center and returned with a stack of used paper.

"Must you do that? You are driving me loopy. Go mope somewhere else. Don't you have something constructive to do?" the ebony-haired boy asked, his face attempting a sternly paternal look she had last seen on

her Da's face the night before. The glowering brow and thin-lipped frown was not an expression native to Connor's face. On Hayrald that look could freeze your blood, but on Connor's eleven-year-old face it reminded her of a cherub with indigestion. Cheobawn bit the inside of her cheek to keep from giggling. "Surely," Connor asked pointedly, "your teachers have your lesson queue loaded with ciphers that you could be playing with."

"I finished them last night after Mora banned me to my room for sassing her during dinner," Cheobawn said. Mentioning the confrontation with Mora brought the anger back afresh to her mind and put her out of sorts with the world once more. "And don't tell me to go read again. I am years and years ahead in my reading lists. The teachers refuse to unlock the adult reading material on my learning station."

Connor's scowl deepened at the mention of the First Mother's name. They were about to start the long-familiar argument again. He thought it unwise on her part to test the limits of Mora's patience and could not understand why she took every opportunity to goad the First Mother into any sort of reaction. He had made his opinion known on this matter on more than a few occasions.

As a precaution, in case he decided to sock her, Cheobawn backed away. The trestle table in the middle of the room stopped her retreat. Turning, she followed its edge, her fingers trailing over the knife-scarred wood. The edge was the only part of the table free of the dross and clutter of the four children who lived here. Cheobawn morosely eyed the unstable pile of maps, reports,

Excerpt from

# Trade Fair

Book Four of the Black Bead  
Chronicles

## Chapter One - Morning, Day 1

A message notice popped into the middle of Hayrald's screen, accompanied by an insistent beep. The border of the message icon bled red into the document behind it.

The First Prime scowled accusingly at his terminal. Did his Husbands not understand that he could not be disturbed for every minor emergency if he was ever to get through these gods-cursed Trade Fair rosters? He had a dozen sparring events scheduled and not enough judges and referees to man them. He needed to shift the schedule around. Again.

Windfall Dome's Trade Fair was in two weeks and he, as First Prime, Husband to the Coven, and First Father, had every Master Craftsman under the dome breathing down his neck demanding more space in the booths along the main promenades while Nedella's kitchen apprentices, wanting to flesh out the feast menus, tried to co-opt

the patrols and turn them into hunting forays. It did not help that every time he left his office he had to mediate an argument between the nestmothers and sparring coaches over the allocation of the practice floors. Dome pride dictated that this year's crop of seven-year-olds be amply prepared for the competitions so as not to shame their teachers. The nestmothers could not be blamed for wanting an advantageous match for their charges.

Thanks be to the goddesses that the burden of hosting a Trade Fair only fell on an individual dome every five years, Hayrald thought, stabbing the alarm icon with his finger.

Phillius's face filled his screen. His Third looked grim, his skin pallid, a fine sheen of sweat on his brow. Hayrald leaned forward, his mood going from annoyance to battle-wary in an instant.

"First Prime, I regret to..." Phillius said, his voice a strangled growl in his throat.

"What is wrong?" Hayrald asked, his sharp tone cutting through the formalities.

"A dubeh has taken one of the children and..."

"Where?" Hayrald barked, rising to his feet.

"We are at the East Gate. The alarm has been sounded to call in the Packs but I do not think all of them are in hearing range."

"You know what to do. Stay there until I arrive." Hayrald paused. Where was Blackwind Pack today? He could not remember. "And Phillius. I need a list of who is out."

"On it," Phillius nodded, signing out.

Hayrald ran for the door, a virulent string of curses

falling from his lips. His assistant, an oldpa named Nashua, looked up in alarm as Hayrald threw the door open.

"Post a level two alert and tell the Weapons Master that I am coming. Follow the protocols until I tell you otherwise," Hayrald shouted in Nashua's direction as he dashed through the outer office.

Hayrald's mind raced as he ran down the three flights of stairs to the floor of the Training Hall. So many questions. How? Why? Why now? The Ears were meant to keep the forays alive. What had gone wrong? He was out the side door and running down the wide promenade that led to the East Gate before he could get his mind working properly. The questions would be answered in time but one thought plagued him. A prayer pounded in his mind to the beat of his feet upon the smooth path.

*Please, goddess, let it not be Blackwind Pack.*

The boy, Iroc of Ramhorn Pack, met him at the East Changing Room, a pair of boots and their liners in one hand and a light armor vest in the other. Iroc tossed him the vest and knelt, holding the boot liner open to receive his foot. Hayrald kicked off his dome slippers and shoved his feet into the offered footwear. Donning the vest, Hayrald stooped to help the young Father snap the buckles in place down the front of each boot.

Zeff arrived, just then, a foray belt laden with a pair of sheathed long knives over one arm and a bladed stick nestled in the crook of the other. The stick Zeff tossed to his First Prime as he drew near, freeing his hands to spread the belt wide. Hayrald walked into its embrace and pivoted, Zeff's sure fingers snapping the buckles closed.

# Glossary

**Alpha:** Dominant male or female in a group. The leader.

**ambient:** The communal psychic cloud surrounding all things.

**Badnite Creek:** The large creek that runs from the White Dragon, past Windfall Dome, down to the cliffs at Meetpoint.

**Bear Under the Mountain:** The group sentience of all life north of the Escarpment.

**bennelk:** Mountain antelope, a smaller cousin of the fenelk, used as a mount for patrols.

**Beta:** Second in command.

**bhotta:** Large lizard, predatorial, hunter. Penultimate predator of the High Reaches.

**Black Bead:** A failed Ear whose psi is suspect and not to be trusted.

**bloodstone:** Stones formed inside the bodies of the animals of the planet tuned by the power of the psi of the builder to vibrate in synchronized harmony.

**blue tag:** Permission tag given to Packs to foray outside.

**Central Plaza:** Plaza under the apex of the dome whose center is marked by a large water fountain.

**Choosingday:** The day three-year-old girls must prove their psi abilities.

**click:** The distance a human man can walk in an hour.

**Com sphere:** A machine made of bloodstones and crystal brains attached to the inside of a gold sphere that acts as an antenna which becomes an extension of an Ear's psi abilities.

**Coven:** The First Mother and all her wives.

**Darknight:** The winter solstice.

**Dragons Spine:** The range of mountains that separate the High Reaches from the northern ice fields.

**Drover:** Mother learned in the art of riding and managing the herd animals of the dome.

**dubeh leopard:** Large black cat-like predator.

**Ear:** Female member of Pack; psi adept.

**East Trail:** Road leading out the East Gate.

**Eiocha:** The largest moon.

**Elder:** Tribal member over the age of sixteen.

**Epona:** The smallest moon.

**Escarpment:** The southern boundary of tribal land.

**fenelk:** Hhorned and tusked antelope from the southern forests, largest herbivore in the High Reaches that has been domesticated and used as beasts of burden by the domes in the caravans that move goods between villages.

**First Mother:** The penultimate Mother in the Dome hierarchy, responsible for all life in and around the Dome.

**First Prime:** First Husband of the First Mother and her Coven. Penultimate Father in the Dome hierarchy.

**fuzzy gang:** Small communal-minded predator as large as a child's fist.

## Rank/Dome Affiliation

### Blackwind Pack

**Alain:** Born in Firewalker Dome, Tam's Second. Beta male of pack.

**Cheobawn:** Born in Windfall Dome, Mora is her Truemother, Nestmother, and natalmother. Black Bead in Blackwind Pack, a rankless Omega Ear.

**Connor:** Tam's Truebrother. born in Waterwall Dome, Tam's Third.

**Megan:** Born in Windfall Dome. Amabel is her Truemother. Rank – alpha Ear of pack.

**Tam:** Born in Waterwall Dome, Alpha male of pack.

### House of the First Mother of Windfall Dome:

**Amabel:** Mora's Second Wife. Master Geneticist, Master Maker of the Living Thread, Megan's Truemother.

**Brigit:** Mora's Fifth. Nursery Mother.

**Hayrald:** First Prime, Mora's First Husband, Husband to the Coven, titular head of the Fathers of Windfall Dome.

**Menolly:** High Priestess to Windfall Dome, Mora's Fourth Wife.

**Mora:** First Mother to Windfall Dome, Alpha Ear of the Coven. High Mother to all the High Reach Domes. Truemother of Cheobawn.

**Phillius:** Hayrald's Third, Husband to the Coven, Head Pack Liaison.

**Raddoc:** Second Prime, and Hayrald's second. Security Chief and Crystalline Mind expert.

**Sybille:** Mora's Third in command. Brilliant warrior, mathematician, chief liaison with Fathers.

**Wissen:** Coven's Husband, Hayrald's Fourth.

### **Ramhorn Pack: Windfall Dome**

**Breyden:** Sigrid's Second. Ramhorn Pack's strategical thinker.

**Erin:** Ramhorn's Alpha Ear.

**Iroc:** Sigrid's Fourth.

**Sigrid:** Alpha male in Ramhorn pack.

**Soral:** Ramhorn Pack's Second Ear.

**Meshel:** Sigrid's Third.

### **Windfall Dome:**

**Brathum:** Elder killed in the first grimstorm.

**Brindle:** An oldpa who occasionally stands light duty at the South Gate into the stables.

**Finn:** Master Tinkerer. Brilliant engineer.

**Gudu:** Finn's apprentice, journeyman.

**Nedella:** Master Chef, Mother in charge of the communal kitchens and food storage.

**Zeff:** Packless oldpa, he runs the boarhounds, Lady and Prince.

### **The Stables:**

**Cloud Eye:** Two-year-old bennelk, novice mount; Cheobawn's mount.

**Druda:** Vinara's Alpha wrangler.

**Gann:** New apprentice wrangler.

**Herd Mother:** Alpha female of the domesticated Windfall Dome bennelk. Dancer, Sybille's mount.

**Kite Wing:** Herd Mother's sister and second in command of the herd. Connor's mount.

**Red Tail:** Five-year-old bennelk. Soral's mount.

**Star:** Older bennelk. Sigrid's mount.

**Vinara:** Master drover.

### **Spacers:**

**CPC:** Central Planets Consortium, the political body that oversees the governance of all human space; collects taxes and conscripts the humans to wage war against the Spiders. Headed by a Prince of the royal family, appointed by the CPC.

**Colonel Bohea:** Agent of the royal hegemony, titular head of the CPC forces arrayed around Cheobawn's



planet, Tearmann.

**Nnursht:** First spider to contemplate space travel.

**Samwell Wheelwright:** Lowlander, born of a wealthy merchant family; college dropout; former CPC conscript and survivor of the Spider Wars.

**Sargent Garro:** Spider Wars veteran; mercenary and agent of the star fleet commanded by Bohea.

**Scerrons:** A species of psi adepts used by the humans as pilots to drag their ships through dimensional hyperspace.

**Spider:** The personification of the Spider hive mind, being that amalgam of energies that contain all the memories of the species of multi-legged, exoskeleton, crystal brained spider-like beings who originated on the planet called Oconomara by the human settlers.

## About the Author



J.D. Lakey was born and raised on the high plains of Montana under an endless sky and as far from civilization as anyone in the twentieth century could get. There she explored the finer nuances of silence and the endless possibilities of the imagination. The stories were always there. The shifting of fortunes finally granted her the time to gather all the stories and give them flesh. An avid reader of science fiction and comics, she currently lives in San Diego, California where she divides her time between her writing, commuting on the I-5, and spending time with her delightful grandchildren.

## A Message from the Author

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed *Spider Wars: Book Three of the Black Bead Chronicles*. This is a story I have been writing in various forms for the past twenty years and I'm pleased to finally be able to bring you the full story of Cheobawn. Many readers have written asking for more and I find the story continues to write itself, so I invite you to continue the journey along with Cheobawn in Book Four, *Trade Fair*.

You are the reason that I keep writing and Cheobawn's story continues to be told. I'd love to hear what you loved about the stories, and yes, even what you hated. You can write to me at [info@jdlakey.com](mailto:info@jdlakey.com) and visit me online at [jdlakey.com](http://jdlakey.com).

Finally, I need to ask a favor. If you enjoyed this book, I'd love a review of *Spider Wars* on Amazon or Goodreads. As an independent author, reviews are the single most important way to ensure that I can keep writing. The powers that be look at quantity and quality of reviews in deciding to support me. You, the reader, have the power to make or break a book.

Thank you again for reading, please keep in touch.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Lakey'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.