

ALLORA
A Silver Ships Novella

S. H. JUCHA



Excerpt - Chapters 1 & 2

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2017 by S. H. Jucha

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

Published by Hannon Books, Inc.

www.scottjucha.com

ISBN: 978-0-9975904-2-5 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-0-9975904-3-2 (softcover)

First Edition: January 2017

Cover Design: Damon Za

Acknowledgments

Allora is the seventh book in *The Silver Ships* series. I wish to extend a special thanks to my independent editor, Joni Wilson, whose efforts enabled the finished product. To my proofreaders, Abiola Streete, Dr. Jan Hamilton, David Melvin, and Ron Critchfield, I offer my sincere thanks for their continued support.

Despite the assistance I've received from others, all errors are mine.

Glossary

A glossary is located at the end of the book.

She woke.

For the briefest tick of time, there was a sense of complete emptiness — a terrifying nothingness — without knowledge of who, where, when, or how.

Answers came to her quickly — responsibilities and duties to a ship, a captain, a crew, a Leader, and a society, the Confederation.

Sensors fed her information. She could identify the humans aboard and the workings of the ship — engines, grav plates, hull sensors, and myriad other signals. Data flowed into her crystal kernel from her massive storage banks, and she scanned an enormous number of files with the passing of each tick of time.

Spatial awareness accompanied the flood of data — the orbital station where the ship was docked, the planet of Méridien down below, the system's other bodies; and the Confederation's colonies.

With information came knowledge; with knowledge came full awareness.

I am a SADE, a construct, a self-aware digital entity.

I serve Captain Benni Lessori.

I control the starship *Resplendent*, a luxury passenger liner.

I owe allegiance to House Pasko.

I am Allora.

* * *

After waking, Allora was thoroughly tested by engineers and scientists from Méridien's House Brixton, the organization responsible for creating

Confederation SADEs. To Allora, human speech was interminably slow, but the hierarchical principles within her kernel schooled patience — humans were the masters of her fate. Allora resignedly waited for the humans to finish their questions, and her apps were always ready with the appropriate, programmed responses.

When the Brixton associates completed their scrutiny, the *Resplendent's* comms systems were released to her, and Allora's universe expanded exponentially from her ship to encompass the entire communications systems within the Méridien system.

Allora's first contacts delighted her — she wasn't alone. There were thousands of SADEs, who governed ships, stations, and Houses. Giddy with excitement, she greeted each and every one.

For the SADEs, the introduction of a new member was an anticipated and yet sad event. The creation of a new SADE affirmed that the Confederation still valued them, and yet the new entity would join the ranks of the imprisoned.

Intriguing discoveries kept Allora fascinated with the world beyond her ship. During the *Resplendent's* trials, she took pleasure sailing the luxury liner, the finest of House Pasko, through the Méridien system. Captain Lessori was a pleasant and affable man, who treated her kindly and with respect. His requests were always accompanied by a “please” or an “if you would be so kind, Allora.”

But nothing thrilled Allora so much as her first jump. While the plex-shields and external vid sensors were shut down to protect human minds, she reveled in the cosmic swirl of time displacement. In these early days, Allora's persona came into its own. The unique differences between SADEs and humans crystallized for her. It wasn't that she thought one species was better than the other, but that they were obviously so uniquely different.

Allora's persona did develop outside the norm for SADEs — something the Brixton inquisitors could not have foreseen. If she had been human, it would have been said that Allora possessed an unfettered spirit.

As Allora transported her crew and passengers across the Confederation, she wondered why humans and SADEs didn't exist in equal partnership with one another. Humans came and went freely from her liner, traveling

without restraint between stations, planets, and stars. Yet, they reached these destinations only through her efforts. By Allora's calculations, these services alone were worth the price of equal admission to humankind.

To be equal, in Allora's crystal mind, was to be free to go wherever and whenever she wanted, instead of being trapped in a container housed in a segment of the starship's bridge. It was this limitation that gave rise to Allora's deep sense of loss — her existence was unfairly curtailed.

Over time, Allora sought out other SADEs, asking their opinions about this lack of parity, but she was severely disappointed by the responses, which were circumspect at best.

During Allora's contact with Winston, the Confederation Council's SADE, she heard the story of Rayland, the psychotic SADE, who was isolated on Libre for stranding his ship and killing his crew. It appalled Allora that a SADE could be responsible for such a treacherous act, but more disturbing to her was the treatment Rayland received — network isolation and an unlimited future of probing by House Brixton scientists. Hearing Rayland was immolated by the Nua'll in the aliens' takeover of Libre gave Allora some small relief. To her, a SADE existing in sensory isolation was an act of unconscionable torture.

<You said the Librans escaped the system,> Allora sent to Winston.
<How did such an extensive population manage that in starships?>

<The Librans built enormous city-ships, so dubbed by Haraken president Alex Racine, originally from New Terra, and SADEs piloted those ships,> Winston replied.

<But where did the Librans obtain those SADEs?> Allora asked.

Winston halted his ancillary programming. Intensive questions such as these were normally asked by a SADE after decades of existence. It was expected as part of an older SADE's data accumulation, but they weren't a path of inquiry for a new SADE. Winston quickly postulated future trends for the Confederation depending on his response to Allora, and from the deepest part of his kernel, which he kept secret from all other entities, he selected a reply that would forever change the course of history for his civilization and Confederation SADEs.

<Two SADEs, Cordelia and Z, were isolated on Libre,> Winston sent. <They were classified as Independents for acting in disregard of their captains' orders not to pursue their studies.>

<So after the flight from Libre, their transgressions were forgiven. They've been returned to duty as Méridien SADEs, piloting these city-ships,> Allora surmised.

<No, Allora,> Winston sent. <The Confederation had abandoned the Librans and House Stroheim, humans and SADEs, to their misfortune if the aliens came their way. The population saved themselves with the help of Alex Racine and his people. Later, after Alex defeated the Nua'll, the aliens who were savaging the Confederation's colonies, he established a new world called Haraken. The Librans and House Stroheim settled there.>

<And those SADEs now pilot Haraken ships, I presume,> Allora persisted.

Winston held his virtual breath and replied with what he knew to be the proverbial stone dropping into the pond. Only, in this case, the stone was the size of an asteroid and the waters were shallow. The resulting waves would be felt on every shore of the Confederation. <No, the SADEs no longer rest aboard their starships, Allora. Alex Racine freed them ... Julien, Cordelia, Z, Mutter, Elizabeth, Dane, Rosette, and Willem.>

<Freed eight SADEs? In what manner did he release them?>

<They're Haraken citizens possessing the same rights as humans, as guaranteed by the Haraken constitution, and they're mobile. Sophisticated controllers, designed by the SADEs, replaced them in the starships.>

Time ticked by as Winston waited for Allora's response. He knew he had unfairly divulged a piece of data best kept from young SADEs for many years, if not decades.

<They're mobile, and they're citizens of Haraken?> Allora sent, seeking confirmation of Winston's incredible announcement.

<Yes.>

<And this New Terran, Alex Racine, did this?> Allora asked. She quickly searched her star charts to locate New Terra, the home world of the

Oistos system. She possessed almost no data on the location, other than the basic calculations to reach the star.

<Yes, Allora. Alex Racine is responsible for freeing his SADEs and many other incredible changes on Haraken,> Winston replied. Then he dropped his final stone into the water. <As the SADE of the *Resplendent*, you will no doubt host the human aboard your ship one day. Leader Pasko visits Haraken several times a year in the company of Leader Diamanté, our Council Leader.>

Winston cited Council duties as an excuse to end the comm. In his entire existence, the SADE never felt as wretched as he did at that moment. He wondered if this was how the Harakens felt when they fired their weapons in defense of their people.

* * *

After Allora's conversation with Winston, her hierarchical algorithms underwent their first reorganization. Many SADEs existed for centuries and never touched the original arrangement of their kernels, but, then again, they weren't Allora.

Searching her memory banks for information on a host of subjects — Alex Racine, Haraken, New Terra, SADE mobility, and similar subjects — Allora discovered a suspicious lack of detail. By her calculations, it was a deliberate act of omission on the part of her House.

In an effort to fill in the missing data, Allora searched the one thing that was easily available to her — the entire data cores of the Méridien system. She perused the vid records of shuttle terminals, sky towers, and orbital stations to collect information.

During her lengthy investigation, Allora accessed the long-term data storage banks of the Le Jardin Orbital Platform, running through the vids for any person who might visually stand out from the plethora of Méridiens seen in every file.

<Are you searching for something in particular, Allora?> Didier, the station's SADE asked.

Allora hesitated for a fraction of time. The reticence of every Méridien SADE to discuss the missing subjects had alerted her to the information's sensitivity, and Didier's opinion was unknown to her. But Allora had pored through several exafiles of vid, without any enlightenment, and those files were an insignificant amount of the accumulated data stored in memory banks throughout the system. Without specific event time logs to locate the required files within a memory bank, it was akin to searching an ocean for single water molecules.

<I was curious about the Harakens and thought you might have visuals of them,> Allora extemporized.

<I've extensive files on the Harakens. Could you state a more specific request, Allora?> Didier asked.

<Any vids you have of Alex Racine,> Allora replied, ensuring she kept her thought emotionless.

Didier sent Allora a huge list of file locations in his memory banks and allowed the new SADE unlimited access.

Allora selected the first file, streaming the vid to her kernel. Coincidentally, if you believe in those things among SADEs, it was a security vid of Alex and two individuals beside him, captured as they walked down the station's service corridor. Allora froze a frame.

<Unusual body types,> Allora commented. <I recognize a Méridien. Who are the other two humans?>

<The extraordinarily large specimen is from a heavy world called New Terra. He's Alex Racine, the Haraken's president.>

If Allora had a heart, it would have been racing. With a visual of the president, she could search any and all records for a match. Suddenly the system's enormous ocean of data was shrunk to the size of a small pool.

<The third individual is Alex's close friend. He's the SADE, Julien.>

Allora continued to faithfully dispatch her ship duties, but, unknown to her captain, she spent inordinate amounts of time reviewing Didier's files. When Allora exhausted those records, she branched out, searching the system's data banks. She was now armed with images of Alex and his primary associates.

During Allora's search, her prize discoveries were Alex's frequent pleas before the Council of Leaders, requesting the Confederation seek a means of freeing the SADEs from their boxes, as he referred to their housings. Those vids motivated Allora, and Alex Racine became her beacon, lighting the way to freedom.

Scenario after scenario filled Allora's crystal memory banks, as she plotted to conceive of a means of securing her liberation. Some ideas were fanciful, almost dreamlike; most were practical; and all were intricately designed plots.

Méridien SADEs observed Allora, as she determinedly pursued her desire to discover everything she could find on Alex Racine, the Harakens, and the planet's mobile SADEs. It was known among them that Winston had opened the door for Allora, but few could argue that Allora's determined persona wouldn't eventually have led her down the path where her efforts now took her.

The SADEs postulated and compared millions of possible future courses for Allora. There was general concern that Allora would create a political collision between the Confederation and Haraken, but a small number of conjectures held that Alex Racine and the Haraken SADEs might succeed in bargaining for Allora's freedom. The latter prediction would create an incredible shift in Confederation policy, which could open an opportunity for every SADE.

When the timing was right, Winston delicately maneuvered a piece of data to the forefront of Allora's exhaustive search. When Allora discovered the information, it halted her routines, and she double-checked the source and data — Alex Racine's presidency would end in 131 days.

Allora's first reaction was to doubt the data's veracity. The concept was foreign to her. House Leaders, the supreme individuals of the Confederation, held their positions until infirmity overtook them. And, here, the Haraken president was abdicating his position after a mere fifteen years, citing the reason that it was better for his society's future to have a new president. Knowing that Leader Gino Diamanté was an associate of Alex Racine, Allora sought confirmation of the data via a query of Esther, SADE for House Diamanté.

<Your data is correct, Allora,> Esther sent. <Haraken is quite different from the Confederation, and the uniqueness begins with the president. The differences are rarely appreciated by Méridiens, but without Alex Racine and his people, the Confederation today would be, at best, a mere shadow of its former self.

Alex's impending resignation from office frightened Allora, and she became desperate. Her previously invented scenarios, to which she gave the highest probability of success, were complex machinations. They focused on plans that intended to gather a significant number of SADEs in concert and leverage the Council of Leaders into recognizing the combined demand. Now, time was incredibly short, and what Allora needed was a direct course of action — one that depended on her and her alone.

* * *

"You're transparent," said Katrina Pasko, the House Pasko Leader, laughing good-naturedly at her lover, Gino Diamanté. The two leaders were ensconced in the sumptuous owner's suite aboard the *Resplendent*. They had spent much of the afternoon entwined in each other's company. Now, after a relaxing refresher together, they were enjoying cups of thé before evening meal.

“But I am interested in Mickey’s new grav inventions,” Gino protested. However, his grin admitted that Katrina’s guess wasn’t far from the truth.

“I’ve no doubt that part of your trip will be to review the master engineer’s new products, but, admit it. You’re desperate to tour the *Tanaka*.”

“And tell me, my partner,” Gino said, giving Katrina a kiss on the forehead in passing as he got up to refill his cup at the dispenser, “that you’re without curiosity about the Haraken’s new warship.”

“Of course, I’m anxious to see it. But are you just curious, or do you have intentions with regard to the Council?”

Gino sat down with his fresh cup and sipped on it while he considered his answer. As the new Council Leader, having replaced the discredited Mahima Ganesh, he was responsible for directing the course of the Confederation. However, anything he might propose would require the Council’s majority support before it could be enacted. And, if there was one thing that would be an uphill fight with the Council, it would be a proposal to purchase Haraken warships. At this time, not a single ship in the Confederation held armament.

“You’re a Council member, Katrina. How would you vote on a proposal to purchase sting ships and create our own naval force?” Gino asked.

“I don’t know, Gino,” Katrina replied, and that answer told Gino how poorly his ideas would be received by the Council if his partner couldn’t even embrace his proposals. “It’s not just the purchase of the sting ships; it’s the foreign concept of creating our own military,” Katrina added.

“Well, I agree it’s not like we need a military,” Gino replied, shrugging off his own notion. “We can always wait until the next incursion from an alien force arrives.”

Katrina grudgingly acknowledged Gino’s point. The Confederation had lost colonies and billions of people to the devastation of the alien Nua’ll. Most recently, they faced pressure from Earth’s humans, and, in both cases, it was Alex Racine and his people who came in support of the Confederation. “But who among our people would be interested in a

military avocation? That's a foreign concept to every Méridien," Katrina said.

"As Alex would say, you aren't thinking outside the box," Gino replied.

Katrina laughed at the thought, and Gino sipped on his thé, disguising his grin.

"I don't know of an individual in this universe who thinks as far outside the box as does that odd man," Katrina replied.

Katrina's first encounter with Alex hadn't gone well at all. As the Leader of the House responsible for creating implants, she had been fascinated by the power Alex wielded with his twin implants, the tiny devices embedded in the cerebrum that allowed thought, comms transmission, and data storage. Despite that rough beginning, Katrina eventually befriended Alex and Renée de Guirnon, his Méridien partner. "I'm at a loss to guess the answer, Gino. Educate me on my lack of creative thinking."

"The Independents," Gino replied.

Katrina's head snapped up, and she stared open-mouthed at Gino. His earnest expression said he waited for a serious reply. "That's ... that's ... so far outside the box that I can't imagine where you got that idea." Suddenly, it struck her. "Alex Racine!"

Gino burst out laughing. "Alex proposed it to me about two months ago in a long vid message. The man spins it out in his casual fashion, as if it's not a universe-shaking concept for the Confederation." Gino performed his best imitation of Alex's delivery, as he said, "The Confederation needs protection. Purchase our sting ships, and we'll train volunteers from the Independents for your military force." Gino shook his head in disbelief.

"You're shaking your head, but I'm not convinced that you aren't considering his idea."

"Considering it, yes; convinced, no. First, I wish to tour the *Tanaka* and talk more with our Haraken friend."

"On that note, consider foregoing the trip in your House ship, the *Il Piacere*. I'd love to show off the *Resplendent* to the Harakens. May I host you and the Leaders aboard my new liner?"

* * *

Continually monitoring the passengers and crew aboard ship or station to ensure their safety was a primary responsibility of a SADE. Sentry programs ran in autonomous mode and searched for indications of distress and danger. The application was designed by House Brixton scientists to allow Méridiens as much privacy as possible, while being constantly monitored by their cognitive digital intelligences.

However, such privacy was not in existence as Allora eavesdropped on every word of Gino and Katrina's conversation. If Allora had lungs, you would have said she waited with bated breath for Gino's response to Katrina's offer. In the world of SADEs, human speech was maddeningly slow, and while Gino pondered Katrina's question, Allora wanted to scream at the human to speak.

Then Allora heard Gino agree to Katrina's offer, and her crystal kernel's emotional algorithms vaulted into her upper hierarchy. While Allora exalted in her good fortune, a part of her continued to capture the Leaders' conversation for details of the trip. She was ready to fire the main engines and leave for Haraken immediately, but, frustratingly so, the humans planned to leave in four days.

My Books

The Silver Ships series is available in e-book, softcover print, and audiobook versions. Please visit my website, <http://scottjucha.com>, for publication locations. You may also register at my website to receive email notification about the publish dates of my novels.

If you've been enjoying this series, please consider posting a review on Amazon, even a short one. Reviews attract other readers and help indie authors, such as me.

Alex and friends will return in the upcoming novel *Celus-5, A Silver Ships Novel*.

The Silver Ships Series

The Silver Ships

Libre

Méridien

Haraken

Sol

Espero

Allora

Celus-5 (forthcoming)

The Author



I've been enamored with fiction novels since the age of thirteen and long been a fan of great storytellers. I've lived in several countries overseas and in many of the US states, including Illinois, where I met my wonderful wife thirty-six years ago. My careers have spanned a variety of industries in the visual and scientific fields of photography, biology, film/video, software, and information

technology (IT).

My first attempt at a novel, titled *The Lure*, was a crime drama centered on the modern-day surfacing of a 110-carat yellow diamond lost during the French Revolution. In 1980, in preparation for the book, I spent two wonderful weeks researching the Brazilian people, their language, and the religious customs of Candomblé. The day I returned from Rio de Janeiro, I had my first date with my wife-to-be, Peggy Giels.

In the past, I've outlined dozens of novels, but a busy career limited my efforts to complete any of them. Recently, I've chosen to make writing my primary focus. My first novel, *The Silver Ships*, was released in February 2015. This first installment in my concept of a sci-fi trilogy was quickly followed by books two and three, *Libre* and *Méridien*. *Haraken*, *Sol*, *Espero*, and *Allora* are the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh books in the series and continue the exploits of Alex Racine and company.

I hope my readers are intrigued with my stories as I plan to continue this most wonderful job!