

EARTHERS

A Silver Ships Novel

S. H. JUCHA



Chapters 1 & 2 - Excerpt

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

Glossary

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1: Madam President

“Major, we have *inbound* transit energy signatures,” Jeremy, the on-duty tech, called out.

With the construction of Tridents, interstellar warships, Sol had established telemetry stations in the system’s far belt. This particular location recorded the exit of the Omnian ships, *Rêveur* and *OS Judgment*, and three Sol Tridents, as the combined fleet embarked on a search to locate the descendants of the colony ship *Honora Belle*. Since then, the station hadn’t witnessed any other transits on this vector.

“Is it the Omnians and our ships?” Major Abel Trent, the station director, asked.

“Yes … uh, no,” Jeremy replied, in confusion.

“A little clarity, Jeremy,” Abel requested, sipping on his caf.

“Well, the first group of ships resembled them, but then there’s a whole lot more ships,” Jeremy said.

Abel set his caf down and hurried to Jeremy’s telemetry station.

A liner and four warships, which were expected, were on approach along a similar vector to what the small fleet had exited on. Behind those five vessels came a multitude of tri-hulls, which gave Abel comfort. “Omnians,” he whispered, smiling.

“Will you look at that one?” Jeremy muttered in awe.

“Now, that’s a ship,” Abel replied.

“Should we contact someone … maybe the rim governor?” Jeremy requested.

Abel chuckled, clapped his newly arrived young tech on the shoulder, and said, “With SADEs aboard, the Omnians don’t need our help communicating with anyone.”

* * * * *

Portia, the president's executive assistant, finished the discussion with the president about tomorrow's itinerary. As she prepared to leave the office, she stopped and listened to her ear comm.

"Madam President, you've a comm from Envoy Morris," Portia announced happily.

"Welcome back, Patrice!" the president said excitedly, when she took the call.

"Nikki?" Patrice asked in amazement. "I knew you were running for the office, but you won!" She eyed Rear Admiral Cordelia, a SADE, who'd kept the identity of the president a surprise for her. In return, she received a wink.

Nikki Fowler chuckled, "You know how it is, Patrice. If you were friends with the big Omnian, it carries a lot of cachet with the citizens."

"He's still big," Renée de Guirnon remarked.

"Renée!" Nikki exclaimed. "Who's with you?"

"Nearly everyone you knew and many more," Alex Racine, replied.

Nikki glanced at Portia, who had held up her slate. Scrawled across its face, it read, "Many ships arriving."

"You'd think it was my birthday," Nikki said, tearing up. Then she swiftly sobered, "Patrice, did you find them?" she asked.

"The commandant, my sister, and I are called Pyreans," Jess Cinders replied. "We're the descendants of the *Honora Belle* colonists."

"It's a pleasure to hear your voice," Nikki replied. "I'd like to welcome you to Earth, the home world of your ancestors."

"And it's pleasing to speak to you, Madam President," Tacnock said.

Nikki and Portia heard all types of laughter, and they exchanged quizzical glances.

"I know Omnian tech doesn't suffer from comm glitches," Nikki said. "What don't I know?"

"We found the Pyreans, and a great many more races, Madam President," Patrice responded. "That was Tacnock. He's Jatouche, and a

friend of Captain Cinders, who you heard earlier. The good news is that this area of space, which is called the alliance, is populated with peaceful races.”

“Any bad news?” Nikki asked.

“There’s always bad news,” Alex replied, “but nothing that can’t be handled by cooperating worlds.”

“Why are you here, Alex? Not that I wouldn’t welcome a cordial visit,” Nikki requested.

“Thought you might like to discuss an alliance with Omnia Ships,” Alex replied casually.

“Absolutely,” Nikki said enthusiastically. She was about to communicate her location. Then she halted and chuckled. “I look forward to meeting all of you,” she added, and the link closed.

“This should make things easier,” Renée commented.

“Why?” Commandant Ophelia Tuttle asked.

“When we first visited Sol, Patrice and Nikki were two Earthers who embraced us,” Renée explained. “We’re old friends.”

“What first brought you to Sol?” Kasie Cinders asked. Her question stirred emotions, which she sensed, and it made her curious.

“That’s a long story,” Alex replied.

“The short version is, at the time, Earth had an ugly government, and our citizens suffered under it,” Patrice admitted. “We went in search of two of our colony ships. That venture turned into a disaster, but it brought the Harakens to us.”

“Who?” Tacnock asked.

“Haraken was our world then,” Julien explained.

“Are conditions better on Earth now?” Tacnock inquired.

“Much better,” Patrice replied, with a relaxed smile.

Ophelia and Kasie, the two empaths, picked up on Patrice’s emotions. They were comforted to sense her confidence in Earth’s new government.

The Omnian and Earther fleets sailed inward toward humans’ home world.

In alliance space, some successes in the fight against the Colony, the insectoid race invading and threatening other races, had been made before the fleets sailed for Sol.

The SADEs detected that the Colony had deserted the Quall dome. Previously, the gentle Quall race had been eliminated by the Colony, and the Packeoies, a federacy race, had been installed on the planet to temporarily fend for themselves. Jess's veterans and a SADE had occupied the dome and locked the insectoids out of the Q-gates, which were the only option available to the alliance to transport individuals and goods between the stars.

Commodore Lucia Bellardo had sailed the OS *Judgment* in the company of the small fleet with the assault veterans aboard to some of the alliance's lost domes. Where there was a ring above the dome, it indicated that the Colony had sent transports across interstellar space to invade the planet.

An Earther pilot, Lieutenant Sharon Reems, was adept at eliminating a Colony shuttle in its launch tube. The clearing of a launch tube enabled Jess and his veterans a means of accessing the tunnels that led to the dome. Their entry was facilitated with the use of a version of Mickey Brandon's newest fighting shadows, a multi-legged avatar with a mounted laser, to flood the insectoid-held tunnels.

After the Colony suffered the first devastating loss against the shadows, the insectoids chose to flee through the gates to escape their attackers. The shadows hunted them, even as the reds and the grays scuttled for the dome's upper deck. Most insectoids never made the gates.

The veterans were shocked at the insectoids' hasty retreat. It was unlike the Colony to choose to run rather than fight.

A dome's console was used to lock out the gates to prevent the Colony's return, and the local alliance race was notified of the returned access. A message was sent to the Tsargit, the alliance governing body. It heralded the success of the combined efforts of Pyreans, Jatouche, Sylians, Norsitchians, Omnians, and Earthers.

Tacnock, Commandant Ophelia Tuttle, and Lieutenant Aputi Tulafono, had made reports to their respective heads of state. The Jatouche

ruler and the Pyrean president appointed Tacnock and Ophelia as envoys to Sol, and Aputi left the president's office with major's insignias on his shoulders. Ophelia couldn't have been prouder of him.

Afterward, the fleets were reformed, and freighters were shared between the commands. Then Tatia Tachenko, the Omnian fleet admiral, directed Admiral Darius Gaumata's command to remain in alliance space and support the Sylian and Norsitchian troops, who assisted the Pims and the Packoees. Rear admiral Deirdre Canaan's command was assigned to accompany the *Freedom*, the *Rêveur*, the *Judgment*, and the Earthers' Tridents to Sol.

Now, as the combined fleets sailed inward toward Earth, Alex, Renée, Julien, and Cordelia occupied the city-ship *Freedom*'s bridge in the late evening hours.

"That's tremendous progress," Renée remarked.

Julien and Cordelia had pulled archival data of their earlier visits to Earth, and they'd accrued recent telemetry imagery of the planet. The comparisons from many years apart were presented side by side on the bridge holo-vid.

"It's the colors, which are remarkable," Renée added. "The atmospheric dinge is gone. It's clear, where there aren't clouds."

"According to Olawale's notes," Cordelia interjected, "there was a concerted effort by the new government to push heavy industry off the planet to Mars and outer moons through tax incentives and low-cost capital loans."

"Our ship technology must have helped them a great deal. That's a lot of dirty shuttle launches from Earth that have been eliminated," Alex reasoned. "Cordelia, any count on them?"

"The controller completed tabulation of Omnian-designed ships soon after entry into Sol's space," Cordelia replied. "Travelers number one hundred thirty-six, and Tridents count seventy-seven. This does not include the three returning Tridents under Commodore Bellardo's command."

"Why so many Tridents?" Renée asked.

"Good question," Alex remarked. "That's one we'll have to ask Nikki."

"Speaking of the president," Cordelia said, "she must be anxious to meet with us. A traveler launched from Earth. I was curious as to its occupant, as the pilot laid a course to intercept this ship."

"Expected arrival time?" Alex asked.

"At sixteen hours," Cordelia replied.

"Just after midday meal. Convenient," Renée remarked.

Alex was quiet, and Renée, Cordelia, and Julien waited.

"You're wondering how Earth's production of Tridents relates to your plan," Julien surmised, when the silence extended.

"Yes," Alex murmured softly.

"We will need Tridents," Renée opined.

"For now," Alex replied, "the domes will do fine for the immediate transfer of a small number of personnel and goods. But the future will require large transports that possess both grav tech and clamshell drives."

Julien copied the fleet's SADEs on Alex's thoughts, and they committed kernel resources to designing solutions.

<Come, my love,> Renée sent. <It's getting late, and you're not a SADE.>

Alex grinned, reached for Renée's hand, and said good night to Julien and Cordelia.

<Conjecture?> Cordelia sent to Julien, as the pair of humans exited the bridge.

<The Tridents would be useful in the federacy, but only if we reduce the casualties incurred when we confront the battleships,> Julien sent in reply.

<I'm a proponent of Admiral Ellie Thompson's concept,> Cordelia replied. <A nonnuclear electromagnetic pulse could be an effective means of rendering the federacy ships inoperable.>

<And when a federacy race copies our tech and uses it against our ships?> Julien asked.

<It'll require that we've an alternative weapon in hand, in addition to having created a defense against the devices the races might use, my partner,> Cordelia replied. <There's consensus that it's time for us to act in accordance with the protection of those races who we find appealing.>

For a brief tick of time, Julien halted most kernel processes. He hadn't been part of the SADEs' sharing. It occurred to him that, like the others who had worked around Alex to push for the distribution of implants, the SADEs had spoken with Cordelia in an effort to influence him indirectly.

While Julien ruminated on what that line of communications meant, Miranda interjected. <I believe we're not addressing the fundamental issue,> she sent. <Surprisingly, the galaxy is more populated by sentient biologicals than might have been postulated. Habitable planets will always be more desirable to them, as opposed to domes on moons or inhospitable planets, and there are relatively few available.>

<The fundamental difference between the alliance and the federacy should be noted,> Z, Miranda's partner, sent. <The alliance races were restricted to moving their citizens only through the domes' gates. The federacy races have starships capable of transportation and domination.>

<If the federacy receives the telomere lengthening expertise or the cell gen injections, it'll increase pressure on the population by extending life spans,> Cordelia reasoned.

<Alex's plan is to provide a deterrent against aggressive actions by the races,> Julien replied. <What we're considering is beyond the scope of his intentions.>

<But not beyond ours,> Cordelia pointed out.

Cordelia's comment reminded Julien that in slightly fewer than ninety years, it would be critical to have selected many teachers for the nascent SADEs. To facilitate that, Earthers, who could be an ideal source of personnel, needed the cell gen injections now. That would ensure they'd be present when the option became available. He made a note to speak to Alex before the president arrived.

Julien's opportunity arrived after morning meal. Only the three of them, Alex, Renée, and Julien, could be present for the conversation. As a precaution, Julien curtailed his comms app, and Alex and Renée did the same for their implants. Their conversation was to be strictly verbal.

Alex gestured to Julien, who'd requested the meeting.

"This is a merger of the information gleaned from Méridien and our discussion about medical tech transfer," Julien said cryptically.

"We can't pick and choose candidates for cell gen injection on the hopes they'll be appropriate candidates when the time is right," Renée objected.

"No, we can't," Julien replied.

"You're advocating making the tech available for the entire Sol citizenry," Alex suggested.

"I am," Julien replied.

"Why such a large pool of candidates?" Renée asked.

"The SADEs have been discussing the pressures that the introduction of Alex's plan will create on populations through further generations," Julien explained. "The plan's goal is admirable, but the sharing of domes and starship tech between the federacy and the alliance will increase the opportunities to expand territory."

Alex leaned back to consider what the SADEs postulated. The Packeoës were a perfect example of overpopulation pressures. "You're envisioning a role for the SADEs to encourage stable growth in the races," he said.

"And foster a desire within the races to exist in extensive dome habitation," Julien said.

"Then you'd need a lot more SADEs," Renée said, understanding the concept.

"Precisely," Julien replied.

"Omnia doesn't have a significant enough pool?" Alex asked.

"Omnia has the most favorable density of candidates for its population size," Julien replied. "But we can't calculate the number of individuals who might wish to volunteer to be educators."

"So, you want to maximize the pool size," Alex surmised. "Preferred races?"

"Humans, to start," Julien replied.

"Méridiens?" Renée asked.

"Apologies, Ser, but Méridiens who remain with the Confederation aren't preferable," Julien said softly.

"The SADEs want New Terrans and Earthers added to the list of Omnians and Harakens," Alex concluded.

"Precisely," Julien said.

“What about the alliance races?” Renée inquired.

“They have the telomere treatment,” Julien replied. “That allows us time to get to know them better and recruit teachers.”

“To bring this discussion around to our immediate circumstances,” Alex said, “I assume you want to introduce implants and cell gen tech to the Earthers.”

“Yes,” Julien replied. “There’s much to recommend the citizens of Sol. In ninety years, we expect great things from them.”

“If we want an alliance with Sol, Alex, we can hardly withhold our med tech,” Renée said.

“Nikki and Sol’s representatives might want an alliance, but the populace can choose not to accept our medical tech,” Alex pointed out.

“What about the Earthers who join our fleet or participate in the plan?” Renée queried.

“Aye, there’s the rub,” Julien said. When Alex and Renée stared at him, he added, “An ancient text. The author described a conundrum.”

Hours later, Cordelia communicated the approach of Nikki’s traveler, and some of the city-ship’s passengers assembled outside a bay to await her arrival.

When Nikki Fowler stepped into the corridor, she fiercely hugged Patrice and Olawale. Then she turned to the Omnians next, including Julien and Cordelia. Afterward, she politely greeted Jess, Ophelia, and Kasie. Finally, she faced Tacnock.

When Nikki appeared undecided, Tacnock offered her an ear wig and waited until the president put it in place.

“I would be pleased to be your first alien,” Tacnock said, spreading his arms in invitation.

Nikki laughed heartily. Then she knelt and hugged the furry alien.

“Was it good for you?” Tacnock asked, with a wink, when they separated.

“Who have you been associating with?” Nikki replied, chuckling.

All digits pointed at Jess, who shrugged his shoulders.

“Where’ve I seen that mannerism before?” Nikki asked, eyeing Alex.

Alex obliged and delivered his usual off-center smile and shrug. It generated human laughter, SADE noises of approval, and Tacnock's chittering.

"Well, Alex, shall we talk?" Nikki asked.

2: Earthers' Future

Nikki was toured through the *Freedom* on the way to the conference room. She was surprised by the enormity of the city-ship, but she was figuratively knocked to the deck by the grand park.

“Two of these?” Nikki asked Alex.

“This ship is the *Freedom*. The other is named the *Our People*,” Alex replied.

“And two fleets like this one?” Nikki pursued.

“The Tridents that have sailed in system with us comprise a command, Madam President,” Tatia answered. “We’ve four of them.”

“Speaking of ships,” Alex said, “Sol has constructed a number of Tridents. Have you been sailing them somewhere?”

“They’ve been transiting to dead systems, target practicing against rocks, and getting a feel for the ships,” Nikki replied.

Nikki had made her remark in an offhand manner, while she stopped to admire fish in a stream. She knew what Alex was asking. The aggressive tendencies of the previous government, United Earth, were dead, and she wanted him to know that.

Alex regarded Nikki, who turned and met his stare with her own. “We’ve been preparing for your return,” she said.

“A readymade force,” Renée said, smiling generously at Nikki.

“What are the captains and the crews prepared to do?” Julien asked.

“That depends,” Nikki replied, “and those are the details to be discussed.”

At that point, the group ended their tour and adjourned to the conference room.

After everyone settled, Alex leaned forward to speak, but Nikki interrupted with a raised hand. He nodded and gestured toward her.

"I need to understand our starting point," Nikki said. "I know the tech that Olawale distributed to us was courtesy of Omnia Ships. Is that the entity that would enter the alliance with us? What about Omnia? And for that matter, what about the other human colonies?"

"Any agreement that we negotiate now would be with Omnia Ships," Alex replied. "Your alliances with the colonies would be negotiated separately. Although, I'm hoping our efforts will bring them to the table to join us."

"Not to sound hostile, but why should Sol form an alliance with a company?" Nikki asked.

Had Nikki Fowler been an empath, she would have known how much ire she had generated with that one question. Olawale and Patrice were the most upset.

"Nikki," Renée said, slipping into the familiar, "for one, this company is the only entity leading the fight to eliminate dangers from sentient worlds, and that included repulsing United Earth's battleship."

"I know our history, Renée," Nikki replied. "I'm not impugning what you've done for us or others. I'm trying to understand if forming an alliance with Omnia Ships precludes or infringes on agreements with the colonies."

"If I might, Madam President?" Cordelia interjected. "Allow me to give you a brief history of Omnia Ships."

In visuals and words, Cordelia presented the evolution of Alex and Renée's company. She began with the reason for its founding. The invention of the faux Swei Swee shells came next. She quickly covered the discovery of the federacy probes and the hunt for the Nua'll sphere, which allowed Nikki to witness the destruction of Tridents and travelers at the battle with the sphere and its bullet ships.

There were many more encounters, such as the engagement against thousands of drone fighters, the battle in the Chistorlan system, and the fight to capture Artifice.

"That entity was destroyed, right?" Nikki asked, shuddering at the concept of a rogue despotic artificial intelligence.

"The Sisterhood —" Alex began.

“Who?” Nikki interrupted.

“That’s another long story,” Alex replied, waving away the subject. “Suffice it to say, Artifice isn’t connected anymore to anyone or anything.”

Cordelia continued with her presentation. She detailed the colonies’ contributions from the Confederation, Haraken, and New Terra.

“So, the colonies build ships and supply crews, and they fight under Omnia Ships’ banner,” Nikki concluded. “Who pays the crews and provides the supplies?”

“Indirectly, you do or will,” Julien replied.

Nikki frowned, and Patrice explained, “The license fees, Madam President. I understand from Cordelia that we’ve constructed over two hundred shell-type Omnian ships.”

“Then the colonies are paying for the privilege of producing your designs,” Nikki said.

“Anyone who builds our ships pays the licensing fee, human or otherwise,” Renée said.

“Are they made beam capable?” Nikki asked.

“In most cases, but there are conditions for those who must prove their intentions,” Alex replied.

“Have you ever thought that you might end up in a war against ships of your own design?” Nikki asked pointedly.

Absolute silence met Nikki’s question. It belatedly occurred to her that Alex and the SADEs might have already considered that possibility and were prepared to deal with that and other eventualities. She glanced toward Patrice, who imperceptibly shook her head.

“Apologies for the question,” Nikki said. “I’m trying to be thorough. What we’re talking about is a huge step for Sol.”

“Your questions are invited,” Alex said congenially.

However, Nikki noticed that the warmth in his voice didn’t reach his eyes. She considered that she’d prematurely rushed into this meeting and should have spoken with Patrice first.

“You’ve convinced me that Omnia Ships is the only entity that is directly involved in the effort to control the federacy’s problems,” Nikki said. “What’s happening in alliance space?”

Cordelia continued with her education of the president, who received a close view of more aliens than she could have imagined. She noticeably twitched when she witnessed hand-to-hand combat with the insectoids. The imagery came courtesy of Lucia Bellardo's implant and showed Jess, Tacnock, and two Crocians fighting for their lives against reds and grays.

Nikki gazed at Jess and Tacnock. She understood why her assumptions about the meeting's nature had led her astray. Sol was relatively sheltered from the galaxy's dangers. At least, it was for now. It might not always be that way.

Cordelia covered the subjects of the Tsargit, the Messinants, and the ancient race's domes.

"Wait!" Nikki exclaimed. "Instantaneous what, Cordelia?"

"It's a little freaky," Patrice said, laughing. "Step on a platform. A console signals a gate. It energizes, and you disappear from the dome in a wash of blue light. Then you appear in another place, light-years away."

Nikki stared openmouthed at her envoy. Then she snapped it closed, and she studied the SADEs in the room. Finally, she focused on Alex.

"I've been slow, haven't I?" Nikki asked.

"No, you've just needed a few moments to adjust your thinking," Alex allowed. "You've always had a quick mind."

"You want the dome technology," Nikki said. "Every race outside the alliance will want a dome with multiple gates, and the alliance will want your shell-type ships. Omnia Ships will be in the center of a massive tech distribution."

"True," Julien replied.

"But for what purpose?" Nikki asked. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Patrice fidget at her question, but she stayed focused on Alex.

"To facilitate alliances, trade, and peace," Alex said. "I'm tired ... we're tired of battling aggressors."

Julien added, "The SADEs support Alex and Renée's goal for Omnia Ships."

"The SADEs of the fleet or Omnia?" Nikki asked.

"All SADEs," Julien corrected.

“You speak for all SADEs?” Nikki asked. From the mouths of every SADE in the room, she heard the simultaneous affirmations of the hundreds of fleet SADEs.

“Our fleet’s SADEs requested Julien lead them,” Alex said. “Then the colonies’ SADEs accepted him in that position.” His eyes shone with pride for his friend.

“Before we go much further,” Patrice interjected, “I’d like to ensure that Omnian medical tech is on the table as a point of negotiation. Our people need it, especially those who might serve in Omnia Ships’ fleet.”

“That’s two issues,” Nikki replied. “The medical tech and how our ships would be incorporated into service, I can easily speak to the first item. I ran for president on a platform that touted we should embrace the colonies and welcome new tech, which included medical versions. I won in a landslide.”

“Seventy-three point eight percent,” Z remarked from a corner of the room, where he’d locked his Cedric avatar.

“Impressive,” Alex remarked.

“The credit goes to you, the Harakens, and the Omnians,” Nikki replied. “Your visits culminated in my election. The expedition finding the descendants of a third colony ship will only add to the citizens’ drive to embrace broader goals.”

“Madam President, we should update you on some changes made during the expedition,” Olawale ventured. “When we realized that we’d encountered a mix of races battling the Colony, it necessitated that we assume a more military command structure. Patrice became expedition co-leader, and your Tridents were placed under the command of Commodore Bellardo. Accordingly, Captain Oleg Tenard was elevated to senior captain.”

Nikki’s eyes narrowed at the subjugation of her forces under Omnian command.

“If I might add to this discussion, Madam President,” Oleg Tenard said. His voice issued from the holo-vid’s base. “The Sol Enclave captains requested to operate under Commodore Bellardo. She’s a battle-hardened commander. Our experience was limited to firing at asteroids. More

important, I believe that after our Trident captains learn of the challenges Omnia Ships has faced, they'll want Omnian commanders to lead them. That's the safest way to operate."

<Admiral Bellardo,> Tatia suggested privately to Alex.

<Agreed,> Alex replied.

<Is that going to create a problem?> Tatia sent.

<We'll find out,> Alex replied.

"Madam President," Alex said, "you're intimating that the majority of your constituents would want our medical tech."

"Absolutely," Nikki replied. "The proposal need only be part of our agreement and ratified by the representatives. You have to understand what it meant to our planet's population when our first Earth-constructed traveler landed at the Assembly building. No noise. No shuttle fumes. It was a shot in the arm of our social psyche."

"Then we can place our medical tech on the table," Alex said.

"Yes," Patrice exulted.

"Sol Enclave ships must serve under Omnian commanders," Tatia said in a manner that brooked no argument.

"Agreed," Nikki replied. "But the ships remain ours, and the crews will be entirely our people."

Alex's brows knitted. Then he said, "For now, complete Earther crews will be satisfactory, but, in the future, it will limit your participation unless it changes. Also, this is acceptable only if every crew member possesses an implant."

"Your captains will come with biased opinions," Tatia said. "That can't be helped, but an order from an Omnian commander isn't something to be considered and discarded. It's to be implicitly obeyed."

"Dereliction of duty charges must be prosecuted by Sol's justice system," Nikki said stubbornly.

Tatia laughed. "We've no intention of disciplining your unruly captains, Madam President. They'll simply be abandoned by the fleet. They can find their own way home."

Nikki glanced sharply at Alex, who stared evenly back.

“Madam President,” Alex said. “You should make that clear to your captains. By the way, you’ve probably formed a naval hierarchy within your Trident fleet, and that’s your business. However, we’ll only accept captains and some senior captains who’ll conditionally hold that rank until we’ve finished evaluating them. Anyone above senior captain stays with Sol’s fleet.”

“Why’s that?” Nikki asked.

“Bad experiences,” Vice Admiral Reiko Shimada replied.

As an ex-Earther, Reiko was a known quantity to Nikki, and she accepted her comment at face value.

“It looks like we have the basic outline of an agreement,” Nikki said. “Will we have any say in the duties of our ships?”

“Not with those who sail with us,” Alex said. “At any time, you’re welcome to trade out your ships or recall them.”

“Except during an engagement,” Tatia quickly added.

“Can I ask how you’ll proceed after this agreement is ratified?” Nikki asked.

“Certainly,” Alex replied, “although the answer isn’t simple.”

Then Alex spoke at length about his grand scheme, as Renée called it. It included the alliance, Earth, the colonies, and the federacy. It encompassed the exchange of tech, especially starships and domes. He painted a future of many races working together to maintain the peace throughout the known galaxy. Then he ended with his intention to bring the Confederation Council and the New Terran and Haraken presidents for a visit to Sol.

“Ah, yes,” Nikki said in response to Alex’s final statement. “The colonies remember us as United Earth.”

“Precisely,” Alex replied. “They need to see the new Sol.”

“Well, I’ll not waste any more of this group’s time,” Nikki said, rising. “I’m going to sail aboard my lovely, oh so comfortable, shuttle for Earth. I’ve got some politicking to do before you arrive. We can work out the details of our agreement in the coming days.”

Wherever appropriate, Nikki delivered hugs, handshakes, and pats on the shoulder. Then Renée led her to where her shuttle sat. Her pilot was in the corridor, chatting happily with a crew chief and a few pilots.

"Our people don't seem to have a problem getting along," Nikki commented, indicating the five individuals.

"They'll often appear to be cooperative and behave similarly. That is until they face a Nua'll sphere, a bullet ship, a battleship wedge, an array of monstrous inbound missiles, or an insectoid rearing in front of them," Renée replied,

In the conference room, Olawale turned to Patrice. "Should you have gone with Nikki?" he asked.

"Nikki's always been direct, if not blunt," Patrice replied. "If she wanted me to accompany her, she'd have said so. I think she didn't want me on Earth and talking to others until she had time to prepare the story her way."

"She seemed much more relaxed than when she arrived," Ophelia interjected.

"Even happy," Kasie added.

"She bargains hard," Tatia commented. "That works for me."

Alex issued a subdued "Hmm." Then he left the conference room and headed for his suite. On the way, he linked to Julien.

<I need a strategy that involves our present combined resources,> Alex sent. <Include about half of Sol's present Trident forces.>

<Alliance or the federacy?> Julien asked.

<The easy one first,> Alex replied.

<How thorough do you wish to be?> Julien inquired.

Alex considered the question. <Two parameters, Julien,> he responded. <First, the fleet's search should be as thorough as possible. Our ships can buy the alliance time. Second, I don't want to see the fleet tied up for a year. Think in terms of a few months.>

<Personnel changes will be required,> Julien pointed out.

<Run the Omnian military options past Tatia. Address the changes of Earther or alliance individuals to me,> Alex replied.

<When?> Julien requested.

<This afternoon would be fine,> Alex replied. <Use the auditorium for the presentation. Ask Z to set up the engineering holo-vid.>

<We'll be ready,> Julien replied. He'd linked to the SADEs the moment Alex requested the strategy.

While Z and Miranda participated in the plan's design, they were on their way to one of Mickey's engineering labs to transport the huge holovid to the auditorium.

My Books

Earthers is the twentieth novel in the interwoven [Silver Ships](#) and [Pyreans](#) series, which tell the stories of three Earth colonies. It's available in e-book, softcover, and audiobook versions. Please visit my website, <http://scottjucha.com>, for publication dates and purchase locations. You may register at my website to receive email updates on the progress of my upcoming novels.

The Silver Ships Series

The Silver Ships

Libre

Méridien

Haraken

Sol

Espero

Allora

Celus-5

Omnia

Vinium

Nua'll

Artifice

Sojourn

Alliance

SADEs

Earthers

Talus (forthcoming)

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche

Veklocks

The Author



From my early years to the present, books have been a refuge. They've fueled my imagination. I've traveled to faraway places and met aliens with Asimov, Heinlein, Clarke, Herbert, and Le Guin. I've explored historical events with Michener and Clavell, and I played spy with Ludlum and Fleming.

There's no doubt that the early sci-fi masters influenced the writing of my first two series, [The Silver Ships](#) and [Pyreans](#). I crafted my stories to give readers intimate views of my characters, who wrestle with the challenges of living in space and inhabiting alien worlds.

Life is rarely easy for these characters, who encounter aliens and calamities, but they persist and flourish. I revel in examining humankind's will to survive. Not everyone plays fair or exhibits concern for other beings, but that's another aspect of humans and aliens that I investigate.

My stories offer hope for humans today about what they might accomplish tomorrow far from our home world. Throughout my books, humans exhibit a will to persevere, without detriment to the vast majority of others.

Readers have been generous with their comments, which they've left on Amazon and Goodreads for others to review. I truly enjoy what I do, and

I'm pleased to read how my stories have positively affected many readers' lives.

If you've read my books, please consider posting a review on Amazon and Goodreads for every book, even a short one. Reviews attract other readers and are a great help to indie authors, such as me.

The Silver Ships novels have reached Amazon's coveted #1 and #2 Best-Selling Sci-Fi books, many times, in the science fiction categories of first contact, alien invasion, and spaceflight.