

EMPATHS
A Pyreans Novel



S. H. JUCHA

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

Glossary

A glossary is located at the end of the book.

-1-
Murder

Aurelia sat on the edge of the bed, waiting in trepidation. Her hands were deeply entwined in the coverlet to prevent tugging on her short robe, which didn't begin to cover her slender legs. She jerked reflexively when the room's door opened and her tormentor, Dimitri Belosov, strolled in, his eyes sparkling in anticipation, and his mouth formed in a lascivious sneer.

"You know I don't like it when you're not ready when I enter," Dimitri snarled, when he spotted Aurelia in her robe. "Strip," he ordered.

Aurelia fingered the robe's tie, but anger smoldered deep inside her, and she attempted to fan its flames.

"Reluctant, are we?" Dimitri said, a cruel smile twisting his lips. "I was going to be generous today, but it looks like you need another lesson, cousin. Get the ropes."

A shudder went through Aurelia at the prospect of being tied up again. Numb to the sights and sounds around her, she walked to a bedroom nightstand and opened a drawer containing Dimitri's favorite devices. For several months, she'd suffered unimaginable abuses at the hands of her cousin. Dimitri was the governor's nephew, and Aurelia was trapped in the governor's home and made Dimitri's personal companion.

Thoughts of suicide crossed Aurelia's mind many times, but she feared her mother and sister, who were also prisoners, would pay a price for her act. Worse, the thought of leaving her younger sister, Sasha, to the likes of Dimitri revolted her.

Anger, frustration, and humiliation welled up inside Aurelia, swirling together, brewing a storm, and overcoming any fear she had for herself and her family. Pushed one step too far, Aurelia desperately grasped the growing courage that insisted she fight back. She focused her power,

released her controls, and pushed the terror at Dimitri that she'd suffered at his hands.

The seventeen-year-old Dimitri eyed his cousin, waiting for her to turn around with the ropes he'd requested. He ached to see the shame on her face. His hunger was nothing personal — any girl would have satisfied what his darkness demanded.

Markos Andropov, the Pyrean governor, had two children with Helena Garmenti. Markos had given Dimitri Helena's eldest daughter, Aurelia, as a companion to his nephew, with the strict admonition that the relationship was to be strictly platonic. Dimitri obeyed the restriction for two weeks. His first furtive attack on his cousin released the blackness that grew inside him since he was a child. With each encounter, Dimitri promised greater acts of revenge against Aurelia's mother and sister, if Aurelia ever said anything to anyone.

"I'm waiting," Dimitri announced. "You know what happens when I'm kept waiting." Suddenly, his pulsing anger was overridden by unfounded doubt. He glanced hesitantly around the room but saw nothing untoward. He considered ratcheting up his threat to Aurelia, but his anxiety, instead of fading, escalated into unreasonable alarm. Dimitri swung around, searching the room for danger.

Unable to locate the source of the creeping nightmare, Dimitri backed toward a point where he could observe the entire bedroom at a glance. His body broke the sensors of the double doors, which led to the balcony, and they slid aside. Dimitri's heart raced in panic, and he broke out in a cold sweat. Swinging his head to and fro, he was frantic to spot the source of his impending doom.

Backing onto the balcony, Dimitri glanced overhead, ensuring the attack wasn't launched from overhead. Hundreds of meters up, the dome's transparent panels filtered Crimsa's weak pink light.

Aurelia sensed her tormentor's full-blown dread. A small voice inside her mind screamed at her to stop, but there was no turning back once she'd started. Instead, Aurelia pushed, sending the horror created by sensing creatures crawling over the skin. Dimitri wouldn't receive her imagery, but

he would be overwhelmed by the unsettling and unreasonable feeling of his skin under attack.

The more Aurelia saw Dimitri swipe at his arms and face and heard him whimper, the harder she pushed. She was desperate to end her torture and had no thought for the outcome of her actions.

Dimitri wailed and pleaded for the terror to cease, but the more he cried, the worse it got. His heart pounded in his chest, and sweat rolled down his face. An overwhelming desire to end the nightmare engulfed him. Relief lay only meters below. Succumbing to the sweet temptation, Dimitri leaned against the railing and tumbled over. As he fell to the rocked walkway below, he thought with relief: *Now, it will end.*

Aurelia ran to the balcony and stared at the body below. Blood from Dimitri's crushed skull splattered the walkway. Her eyes darted around the grounds, searching for witnesses. Spying none, she raced back through the bedroom into the corridor beyond. In her panic, she could think of only one place of sanctuary, her mother's quarters, one floor up. She ran down the corridor, accessed the disguised actuator, and dashed through the hidden panel as it opened. She raced up the servants' back stairs, which ended at the third floor. Tripping the hidden catch to open the door to the family's quarters, she burst into the room, crying.

Aurelia's mother, Helena, was brushing the hair of her younger daughter, Sasha, and Aurelia's distraught emotions were broadcasting so strongly that Sasha broke into tears. Helena hushed Sasha, sending her to the girls' bedroom, and hurried to embrace Aurelia.

Through tears and sobs, Aurelia told her story, her entire story — the months of sordid transgressions by Dimitri, despite the governor's admonitions, and the nephew's perverse intentions only moments ago that had caused her to rebel.

"Mother, I pushed with all I had," Aurelia wailed. "All the darkness he ever visited on me, I returned tenfold. He cried and screamed and begged, and still I didn't stop. He backed into the balcony railing and fell over."

Helena held Aurelia, miserable at the thought of what her beautiful and sensitive daughter had endured. "How badly is he injured, daughter?"

“There was blood everywhere, mother. It came from his head, and his skull was oddly shaped.”

Cold fear struck Helena’s heart, and she fought to prevent her emotions transmitting to her daughter. Both of her daughters were sensitives, empaths, as was she. Young Sasha had already exceeded her mother’s power, and Aurelia surpassed her capabilities by the time she was nine. Thereafter, year over year, her older daughter only grew stronger.

The governor had hoped that Aurelia could attenuate Dimitri’s darkness and promote a sense of well-being, but neither Helena nor the governor imagined the nephew possessed the deviant proclivities Aurelia described or that he would employ blackmail to silence her.

“You must run, Aurelia,” Helena urged her daughter. “No good can come of this. Dimitri belongs to one of the domes’ premier families. They will demand justice, and the governor will be forced to offer them a sacrifice in hopes he can keep his secret. Your only hope is to run. You must make it to the El and escape to the station, but don’t go to security. Trust no one until you reach Harbour aboard the *Honora Belle*.”

While Helena raced to open a hidden panel, artfully concealed inside a clothing closet, sixteen-year-old Aurelia stood frozen. She had fled to her mother for safety but was being told that there was none to be had in her arms. She closed her eyes, and her thoughts faded into hopelessness only to be buoyed by waves of love. Aurelia opened her eyes to find her mother standing before her, pushing with all her strength. Aurelia dropped her mental guards and let her mother’s affections wash through her mind.

“Here, daughter,” Helena said. She shoved a c-chip ring into Aurelia’s hand. “Wear this. There’s not much coin on it, but it might help. And take these,” she added, handing Aurelia a hand-drawn map and a set of instructions. “Use these to guide you to the El, but you must get clear of our dome as fast as you can without attracting attention. The governor’s people will be hunting for you. Once you exit our dome, you can study the remaining details.”

Aurelia slipped the c-chip ring on a finger, while Helena ran to the bedroom, calling to Sasha, “Come daughter, hug your sister goodbye. She’s leaving.” When Sasha hesitated, Helena projected strength, saying, “Your

sister is in trouble and must flee for her life. Hug her, return to your room, and crawl into bed. You must appear to be asleep, and you never saw your sister return to our quarters. Now, go, say your goodbye quickly.”

The two sisters fell into each other’s arms. Sasha was in shock at the thought of losing her sister, but streams of love overrode her fear. Tears stung her eyes. Her sister always sensed her darker moods and lent her strength. This time, rather than play the passive and enjoy her sister’s mental ministrations, she pushed back with her love.

“Enough,” Helena announced sternly, breaking into the sisters’ farewell. “Sasha, go to your room and remember what I said.”

As Sasha waved goodbye at the bedroom door, Helena shoved clothing into Aurelia’s arms. She could see her daughter mentally struggling and sought to break her out of her daze. “Come, Aurelia, there’s no time to waste.” She tugged on the robe’s belt, and Aurelia mechanically stripped the garment off. “Dress in these,” Helena instructed. “You must appear as a privileged Pyrean.”

Aurelia required her mother’s help to don the unfamiliar fashions of a wealthy, young, Pyrean girl. The dress, what there was of it, draped and clung, with hidden fasteners to artfully reveal swaths of young skin. The shoes defied description. Impractical was the first thought that occurred to Aurelia. They were flamboyantly delicate.

Once her outfit was complete, Aurelia turned to a viewer, dutifully turning in a circle, and a set of lasers translated her image into a 3D projection. Aurelia scarcely recognized herself, and she turned a questioning look at her mother.

“I have tried to prepare for this day, child of my heart,” Helena said. “My plan was that one day all of us would escape together, but you must go now. When you reach the El, you must change into these.”

Helena opened a stylish shoulder bag, which matched the fabric of Aurelia’s dress. “There’s a cap, to disguise your hair, coveralls, and ship shoes. You must take on the appearance of an El tech and that means, when the gravity disappears, you remain relaxed, as if you’ve done this many times before. The instructions I’ve given you will tell you how to

board the El. Ensure you hide the clothes you're wearing when you change into these."

Aurelia felt her mother pull her around and lay a mist mask over her face, activate it, and study the application of preprogrammed makeup on her face. Aurelia turned back to the viewer. The face of a young, pretty, privileged Pyrean girl stared back at her, subtle shades of color and glitter flowed across her face in rivers. The youth of Pyre loved artful camouflage. Her mother grabbed Aurelia's long, straight hair and twisted it into a knot on the top of her head, shoving two trans-sticks through the knot to hold it in place. The bright, glowing trans-sticks, which constantly shifted colors, hid their function, which was to relay a person's comm-dot.

"Place this in your ear," Helena instructed, handing her the comm-dot. "The device isn't active, but if you're approached, and, daughter, looking as you are, you will be, wave them off with a finger and pretend you're conversing with your sister. Remember, you're one of the elite. You choose who will receive your attention."

With Aurelia's transformation complete, the two women hugged, pushing enduring love at each other. Then Aurelia slipped out of the room into the third-floor corridor. She navigated down two flights of back stairs to reach the ground level. She slipped through the side garden and past decorative gates to reach a ped-path.

Aurelia found balancing on the delicate shoes a challenge. *I'm running for my life and I might as well be hobbled*, she thought angrily.

Helena was right about one thing. Aurelia had little time to study her instructions and set out in the right direction before three young men in an e-trans glided silently up behind her.

"Hey there, pretty one," one youth said, running his hand down the back of Aurelia's thigh.

If Aurelia hadn't dealt with Dimitri for the past few months, she might have jumped out of her skin. Instead, she turned a cold eye on the youth, pointed a finger at her comm-dot, and imperially waved her fingers, shooing the youths along.

The boy in the control seat of the e-trans said, "Resume," and the vehicle accelerated to its usual speed. None of the threesome reacted

blatantly to Aurelia's dismissal. Her manner of attire indicated she was someone of importance, and they didn't dare anger the daughter of a powerful family.

Luck was with Aurelia. An empty e-trans passed her, responded to its programming, and turned around to crawl beside her. Recalling the actions of the youth, who had been in the other transport's control seat, Aurelia climbed in behind the screen. She opened her instructions but couldn't find anything about how to order the vehicle.

Mother, I guess you weren't any more knowledgeable about the grounds outside the governor's house than I am, Aurelia thought. It hit her that Helena was only a year older than she was now when she was kidnapped. One moment, her mother was topside, enjoying her teenage life, and, the next, she woke up in a bedroom in the governor's house downside. It occurred to Aurelia that Helena must have gathered snippets of information throughout her adult life on Pyre to put together her plan. *Thank you, mother,* Aurelia thought, wishing she was hugging her one more time.

"Destination, miss," Aurelia heard, snapping her out of her reverie.

"The El, please," Aurelia said, with all the authority she could muster.

"Yes, miss. Travel will be through four dome connections and take approximately twenty-eight minutes," the voice said.

A smile plastered across Aurelia's face. For the first time since Dimitri fell to his death, she felt hope. But, it was quickly vanquished by a rush of guilt *He didn't fall to his death, Aurelia; you pushed him. Maybe not with your hands, but you pushed him, nonetheless,* she thought.

Aurelia's thoughts scared her for more than one reason. Her mother had repeatedly admonished her that she was an empath with tremendous power, but Aurelia had no means of measuring and comprehending her strength. The only people she'd openly shared her power with were her mother and sister, and then it was rarely a negative emotion. Even when Sasha attempted to infuriate her, she was careful to be patient and return her sister's dark emotions with calming support.

Dimitri's actions had broken her control. Where she was normally fearful in his company, there was a sudden uncontrollable anger and a

desire for revenge. Her mother's repeated warnings came back to her, "Aurelia, child of my heart, you've no idea what you can do with your mind. You must be careful. I wish I could train you, but I was never taught, and I have little concept of how to teach you. All I can tell you is that you must minimize your emotions. Never push with even half your strength."

Before recriminations could grow, the e-trans slowed, as three Pyrean youths in bright, colorful clothing skipped through the front gate of an elegant home, and one of the boys stepped in front of the transport to stop it.

"Where you going?" a girl asked Aurelia.

"The El," Aurelia replied.

"Great," the girl replied. "Jump in," she ordered her companions.

The moment everyone was seated, Aurelia said, "Resume," and was relieved that the e-trans proceeded on its way.

The boy in the front seat with Aurelia said, "E-trans, destination dome five, block three."

"Understood, sir," the voice of the e-trans replied.

When the boy turned to eye Aurelia, she abruptly laughed and said, "Oh, Sasha, you say the funniest things." The entire trip with her companions, Aurelia kept up an imaginary conversation with her sister. In her mind, she was repeating a conversation they had a few days ago. Then, it had been funny, but repeating it made her stomach clench at the thought she might never see her sister again.

After transiting several domes, the car stopped, and the threesome climbed out. Aurelia waved her fingers brightly at the girl who'd asked her destination, and the teenager signaled back with a hand motion Aurelia couldn't translate. Instead she ordered the e-trans to continue.

While the transport was navigating the next interconnector, which was designed to isolate the domes from each other in the event one of them was breached, Aurelia hurriedly reopened her instructions. At the far end of the transparent tunnel, the sign on the upcoming hatch read "Dome 8, El Transport," and, soon after entering the dome, the e-trans came to a halt.

Aurelia anxiously looked up. She hadn't finished reading her instructions, but a group of people were approaching a growing line of empty e-trans, and her transport had joined the line. She stuffed the instructions into her bag, continued her charade of conversing with Sasha, and climbed out of the vehicle.

Close to panic, Aurelia angled away from the massive landing pad of the space elevator. A line of Pyreans was waiting to board the El for transport to the station, and Aurelia wasn't ready to put her mother's plans in action.

A stack of crates seemed the perfect hiding place, and Aurelia casually walked behind them, despite the pounding of her heart. When no hail or shout of alarm followed her, she breathed a deep sigh of relief and opened her instructions. She read carefully. Many of the steps were foreign to her, since she'd never been off the governor's grounds. At the end of them, her mother had written, "I love you, Aurelia, memorize these instructions and dispose of them. If you make it to the joss and security questions you, they must not find them on you."

Mother, couldn't you have told me what the joss was? Aurelia thought. She read the instructions twice more and then knelt to unpack her next disguise. She glanced around to see if anyone was watching her. Confident she was hidden from view, she yanked out the trans-sticks, the colorful hair adornments. Then she opened a small container and pulled a single mist wipe out. Following her mother's instructions, she pressed it to her face and felt the tingling sensation she was told to expect. When it stopped, she examined her face in a small mirror, and removed the little amounts of makeup that were missed.

Next, Aurelia stripped out of her frilly clothing and silly shoes, grateful she didn't have to walk anymore in them. She unpacked the tech clothing and slipped on the coveralls. The legs and arms ended past her ankles and wrists, and there was room in the body for her little sister. The poor fit reminded Aurelia that her mother was desperate to accept any clothing she could procure to fulfill the family's escape plan.

Aurelia twice folded the ends of the voluminous coveralls' arms and legs until they ended at her wrists and ankles. She tucked her long, auburn hair

under the cap and yanked it down on her head. Thin socks and some light shoes, which had a quick close and an odd coating on the bottom, completed the outfit.

The El had yet to return from its last trip topside, and Aurelia was forced to wait. As time passed, she grew more nervous, sure she would be discovered. To occupy her mind, she practiced walking, as per her mother's instructions. She wasn't an elite anymore; she was a tech. Techs don't appear proud and are careful to pay deference to privileged downsidiers.

Twenty minutes later, Aurelia breathed a sigh of relief. The El car was transiting the dome's airlock, which kept Pyre's heavily laden air, contaminated with noxious gases and ash, out of the dome. When the El settled onto the landing pad, there was another excruciating waiting period for Aurelia, while the passengers exited the upper level and the cargo crew dropped a ramp on the lower level and began offloading passengers' personal items and freight. Aurelia recognized that the crew wore similar clothing, except much nicer and better fitting, to the coveralls Helena had given her.

Aurelia waited until the line of passengers, who were traveling topside, had dwindled to a few stragglers, and the cargo crew's trips down the ramp seemed to be ending before she left her hiding place and walked toward the car's lower bay. Aurelia was near the ramp when she heard a demand by an angry voice, "Where you been? Grabbing a nap or something?"

"Sorry, sick to my stomach," Aurelia replied, holding her lower abdomen and playing true to her mother's ruse.

The cargo chief took in the ill-fitting coveralls worn by the teenager, and his demeanor softened. "Newbie, huh? You'll get used to it. It always hits the newbies hard, if they've never left the station. But, hear me, newbie, admin might have hired you, but you work for me now. If you haven't checked in with me and you're not wearing a badge, you're not earning any coin. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir," Aurelia replied, quickly bobbing her head.

"And another thing, newbie, as soon as you collect some coin, purchase a decent pair of coveralls. That pretty face of yours will only get you so far.

Once the downsiders get a look at those coveralls, they're going to start complaining about the service. So, don't embarrass me. Now, get aboard."

Aurelia nodded and hustled up the ramp. The freight crew was seated and strapped in, and Aurelia took an empty seat at the end of a double row and fumbled with her straps and buckle before she got it right. She could hear the snickers of those around her at her ineptitude, and she reined in her anger. *Try being in prison all your life, and let's see how well you get on in the world*, Aurelia thought.

The cargo chief walked by Aurelia and handed her a bag. "If you're going to be sick, newbie, use this instead of spraying my deck, and after this lift, come see me. You're supposed to report to me first. Not start work, unless maybe you don't want to be on the rolls. In which case, you'll be working without earning any coin," he admonished before he took a seat and connected his harness.

A senior crew member leaned over to the chief and said, "I don't think that one is going to make it."

The cargo chief grunted in reply. *A shame*, he thought, *the girl looked like she could use a break*.

A red light flashed for five seconds, and Aurelia felt the car move. For a while, there was little sensation other than the car's stopping and starting as it transited the airlock. But, after that, and the higher the car rose, the lighter she felt. Soon her stomach seemed to want to climb out of her throat. She gagged, swallowed, and tasted bile.

A boy across from Aurelia, not much older than her, motioned holding the bag tight to her face and taking short, quick breaths. His pantomime didn't make much sense to Aurelia, but she did as he indicated, since she sensed compassion and sympathy from him. Keeping the bag tight to her mouth made it difficult to breathe. Within thirty seconds, the dizziness and nausea she was experiencing subsided, and Aurelia realized she'd been hyperventilating, dragging in huge gulps of air, as the weightlessness accelerated her anxiety.

Slowly, Aurelia gained control of her upset stomach and calmed down. She pulled the bag from her mouth and smiled crookedly at the boy across from her. Around Aurelia, the crew, including her sympathetic helper,

underwent various reactions, indicating that Aurelia had driven their fears too, and now they were recovering. That realization alone jarred her, and she concentrated on sending soothing calm. The last thing she needed was to have the cargo crew suspect she was a sensitive.

Finally, the El car decelerated and came to a stop. Aurelia determined the best course of action was for her to pay close attention to the boy across from her. He picked up on her intention after tapping the release for his harness and noticing that she did the same thing and waited. He exaggerated placing his shoes firmly on the deck, picking up one, and placing it back down before he picked up the other.

Aurelia felt a tacky sensation from the soles of her shoes when she walked across the decking after climbing aboard the car. Now, she understood why. She nodded to him, and, when he stood, she did too.

“Look, best you stick with me,” the boy said to Aurelia. “I’ll operate the e-cart. You stand by. I’ll signal you when I have the load secured. Then, you unlock it from the deck. Okay? And, the name’s JD.”

Aurelia smiled shyly at him, thanking him for his kindness. It seemed best not to encourage him, but she couldn’t help sending the smallest amount of appreciation.

JD used a hand signal to tell Aurelia to wait, and he left. The thought of being weightless made Aurelia giddy. She wanted to shove off the deck and fly, but she noticed that around her the crew were walking with a fixed gait, placing one foot solidly before lifting the other. *Once you leap up, silly girl*, Aurelia admonished herself, *just what are you going to use to guide yourself around ... wings?* The thought of having wings made her snicker, which drew a few glances her way, and she cleared her throat and tried to look as if she belonged on the crew.

When JD returned, driving an e-cart, he pointed a device at the crate in front of him. A red telltale flashed, and he read something on a handheld device screen and then stuck the unit to the front of his coveralls.

Aurelia stepped away from the load, noticing the e-cart’s wheels were covered in the same material as the bottom of her shoes. She glanced down at the pallet that JD hooked to his cart and saw a clamp attaching it to the deck.

“Got it,” JD said. “Release the load.”

Thankfully, for Aurelia, the clamp had a square, red button, which was labeled “load release,” and she happily mashed it, watching it spring free of the pallet. She stood and smiled at JD, who gave her a silly grin and shook his head. “Both sides, newbie,” he said good-naturedly.

Aurelia mimed “oops” to him, flashed her best smile, and then hurried to the other side. She could sense JD’s reaction, and it gave her mixed feelings. They felt similar to the emotions Dimitri emanated when he looked at her but without the ugly darkness. She released the second lock and gave JD the thumbs-up signal she’d witnessed the other assistants giving their e-cart operators.

When the belly of the El car was empty, Aurelia followed behind JD’s last load. After exiting the El car, he turned toward an airlock that would accommodate his e-cart and load, but Aurelia spotted a sign that directed people to the El car’s passenger access level, and she followed the sign up the ramp.

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Secrets

A stationer, Phillip Borden, who rotated planetside for three weeks of each month to tend the grounds of many of the dome's wealthier families, finished checking the beehives in the rear of the governor's home.

Every inch of the grounds under the domes that wasn't covered by environmental control buildings, houses, ped-paths, walkways, patios, or other small sundry items was planted with small fruit trees, herb gardens, and flowering shrubbery to satisfy the bees' desire for pollen. Crimsa's light, which was filtered by the hazy atmosphere, required the bioengineering of every plant species brought from Earth to thrive. No plant cuttings were ever wasted. Each house had several composts.

The domes tended to be as self-sufficient as they could be for food, but they still depended on an exchange with the orbital station, which contained extensive hydroponic gardens and protein culture vats.

Phillip was carrying a collection of honeycombs to the house when he spotted Dimitri's body. A weaker person might have dropped the precious container, but, like most stationers, Phillip had seen his share of death. After witnessing a fellow human killed by explosive decompression, there's little that can disturb an individual about a dead body.

Despite the gruesome circumstances, Phillip obeyed rule number one of his employment: Never enter the house, no exceptions. Setting the honey container on the patio, Phillip pulled his comm unit and contacted Giorgio Sestos, the governor's head of security. Sestos was the kind of man, who when he laid down rules, Phillip, having a sensible head on his shoulder, knew better than to disobey any of them.

"Sestos here, go ahead, Phillip," the voice on the gardener's comm replied.

"Sir, Dimitri's on the back patio. He's dead."

“Dead? Are you sure? Did you check for a pulse?”

“It wasn’t necessary, sir. I think he fell from the balcony. His head looks squashed.”

“Anybody in sight when you approached the body?”

“I didn’t see anyone, sir.”

“Stand by the body, Phillip. On my orders, no one is to touch the body. I want the evidence preserved. I’ll be there in five.”

“Understood, sir.” Phillip barely finished when the comm signal cut off. He stared at Dimitri’s blank eyes and the darkening pool of blood. *Couldn’t have happened to a better kid*, Phillip thought, but he was careful to keep his expression neutral. At this point, caught smiling over the body of a household member could make him a suspect.

In short order, Giorgio Sestos and a second security man came through the patio doors. They were careful to step in a wide circle around the body.

“Did you or anybody else touch the body after you discovered the boy?” Giorgio asked Phillip, drilling the groundskeeper with cold eyes.

“No, sir,” Phillip replied evenly. He knew Giorgio was a dangerous man, but he was too old to be intimidated by him.

“Sniffer scan, then body temp,” Giorgio ordered the second man.

Pulling a sniffer from a case, the man leaned over and traced the body at about 8 centimeters above it. While the sniffer analyzed the intake, he inserted a digital thermometer into Dimitri’s ear. When the sniffer beeped, the man checked the results. “Negligible results on the scan, Mr. Sestos. No significant DNA contamination here. Body temp suggests the boy died within the last hour.”

“Where were you during that time, Phillip?” Giorgio demanded.

“Pruning fruit trees and then at the beehives, sir,” Phillip replied, pointing to the container of honeycomb near his feet.

“And you heard nothing?”

“I thought I heard an argument or, at least, Dimitri’s voice from an upper floor. But, I’ve often heard him raise his voice. So, I didn’t think anything of it. If you’re asking if I heard anyone else or if I heard Dimitri scream as he fell, the answer is negative.”

Giorgio regarded the misshapen skull. *The impact must have been head first*, he thought, and he stepped out to look up at the second- and third-floor balconies. “Stay with the body,” he ordered his man and ran back into the house. Giorgio didn’t wait for the lift but ran up the back stairs instead. In the private bedroom reserved for Dimitri, he searched for signs of a struggle, but there was no evidence of any. A drawer was open, revealing Dimitri’s sex toys, and Giorgio closed it, thinking he should get rid of the items before the household or, worse, the governor discovered them.

Carefully checking the railing, Giorgio found no marks or scuffs. It looked as if the boy had gone over the rail without a struggle. Except Giorgio knew Dimitri wasn’t the type to commit suicide. “I knew this day would happen,” he muttered. “You had to play domination games with a powerful teenage bender, didn’t you, you little idiot?”

In a foul mood, Giorgio took the stairs one floor up to Helena’s rooms. She and her daughters occupied half the house’s top floor, where their isolation could be easily maintained. Giorgio didn’t bother knocking, hoping to catch the family by surprise.

“Mr. Sestos, how rude of you,” Helena said tartly. She was busy preparing a meal, and the small table was set for three people. “I didn’t make enough for four if lunch is what you’re after.”

“Where’s your daughter?” Giorgio demanded.

“Which one?” Helena retorted, turning to face the man she’d come to despise even more than the governor.

“Don’t play games with me, woman. Where’s Aurelia?”

“She’s with that psychopath. It’s where she is every week, at this time.” Then Helena smoothly switched roles. “Why are you asking? Did something happen to my daughter?”

Not getting the expected reaction, Giorgio stomped across the sitting room and opened the girls’ bedroom.

When light spilled into the darkened room, a sleepy-eyed Sasha raised her head from a pillow, saying, “What’s wrong?”

Giorgio turned on the lights, and Sasha sat up quickly, calling, “Momma.”

Helena ran to the doorway and called out, “Stay in the bed, Sasha. The governor’s dog is searching for a bone.”

Giorgio checked the girls’ room thoroughly, and then he searched the rest of the accommodations. When he was done, he faced Helena squarely, hands on hips, and said, “I’ll give you this last chance to tell me where Aurelia has gone.”

“If that creature has hurt my daughter and done something with her, I’ll make you and your master pay. One way or the other, I’ll make the two of you pay.”

Giorgio wasn’t scared of Helena, she didn’t have the power, but when he felt fear creep up his spine, he eyed Sasha, who was standing in the bedroom doorway, a coverlet around her, glaring at him.

“Don’t, kid,” Giorgio warned Sasha, “or I’ll be happy to juice you.” He patted his injector pistol for emphasis. Immediately, the unnerving sensation disappeared.

“Benders,” Giorgio said, with disgust. “You’re a bunch of abominations who should never be allowed to exist.” He didn’t wait for a reply but left in a hurry. It took him a few minutes to search the house and discover Aurelia was nowhere to be found. Then he went to a small room on the first floor located at the back of the house and unlocked a door to which only he knew the key code.

Using a palm scan and a second code, Giorgio activated the monitors of the house’s surveillance. He rolled back the recordings to an hour and a half ago, focusing first on Dimitri’s private bedroom. He slowed the file to normal speed to watch Aurelia undress and don her short robe before he fast-forwarded to Dimitri’s entrance. Activating, the audio, he listened to the exchange.

Giorgio discovered he didn’t need the audio. He could tell by the change in Aurelia’s body language and facial expressions that when she turned from the drawer the girl had had enough of Dimitri’s depraved attentions. He watched the boy’s fear escalate until the terror that was etched in his face totally consumed him. Aurelia stalked him, and, driven by desperation, Dimitri deliberately leaned backward over the balcony’s railing.

The scene gave Giorgio chills. The girl was untrained, completely unaware of her tremendous power and how to control it.

“And thanks to you, Dimitri, she’s loose in the domes and mad at the world. I pity the next poor slob she meets and who doesn’t know enough to shock or juice her first and ask questions later,” Giorgio said, addressing the monitor, which showed an image of Aurelia’s face contorted in anger.

Searching surveillance footage, Giorgio found a good closeup image of Aurelia, which he loaded into his comm unit and sent out to his network. The accompanying message said, “Report the location of this girl. Don’t approach. Reward offered. DNS.” The acronym, which ended the message, meant the recipients weren’t to share the information with others. It was for their eyes only. It also said this was a high priority request and the reward would be significant.

Throughout the domes, hundreds of people, who had done business with Giorgio at one time or another, raced to be the first to provide the information to the governor’s head of security. It was an El tech, Gerald, monitoring the cams focused on the landing pad and the airlock, who spotted Aurelia. He had loaded her image into his system and ran a face recognition comparison on the passengers, who boarded the most recent car to lift. When that search returned as negative, the tech widened the program’s input to include the pad and surrounding freight areas.

The recognition program returned a 72.8 percent match, and Gerald zoomed in to study the girl, in ugly coveralls with a cap jammed down on her head, who was climbing the car’s ramp. The El car’s cargo chief seemed to recognize her, which made the tech doubt he’d found the target. However, the possibility of earning coin drove him on, and he selected the widest cam view of the pad and freight area. Locating the girl talking to the cargo chief, Gerald reversed the recording. He watched her walk backwards to hide behind a stack of crates.

Gerald found the girl had waited and watched the landing pad from a hiding place, which made the tech suspicious, and he reversed the recording at high speed, pausing when he caught her changing clothes. “Got you,” he whispered, snatching up his comm unit.

“Mr. Sestos, this is Gerald at the El pad. I’ve found your girl.”

“Don’t approach her, Gerald. We’ll be right there,” Giorgio replied.

“Sorry, Mr. Sestos, she’s gone. She snuck aboard the *El* as cargo crew. She’ll make the station in another half hour.” When Gerald heard nothing, he was tempted to ask about the reward but thought better of it. Shortly thereafter, the comm went dead.

“Well, the day’s not been a total waste,” Gerald whispered, an ugly smile on his face. He accessed a back door in the monitoring system and sent the recording of Aurelia changing her clothes to his comm unit.

Giorgio’s comm unit was tucked against his chin, as he thought. Gerald would get his reward, but he had more to worry about than that.

An eighty-year-old agreement regarding empathths was broken when Giorgio helped the governor kidnap Helena. At the time, it was a calculated gamble on his part. He was a new hire on the governor’s security detail. But assisting the governor with his dangerous and foolish action placed Giorgio in a position of power and confidence, and he’d reaped the reward every year since then.

However, Giorgio knew that the governor and he were lost if their crimes were discovered. It wasn’t only the kidnapping and illegal incarceration. There existed a delicate truce between topsiders and downsiders about empathths, after a series of ugly incidents surrounding their mistreatment. A binding agreement was signed by all parties, stating that when an empath was identified, he or she was to be sent to Harbour aboard the *Honora Belle*, the old colony ship, to be trained. When she certified their training period was successfully completed, they could choose to live on the station or aboard the *Belle*.

Since the initiation of the agreement, not a single identified empath had ever returned to the station. They’d stayed with Harbour. Coincidentally, not a single empath had ever been born to downsiders, and it was those in the domes who had transgressed against sensitives before the agreement was in place, which is why it stated that no empath could reside downside, under any circumstances.

Giorgio tried one last tactic to reacquire Aurelia before he contacted the governor and sent a coded signal to a contact on the station’s security force.

When he received a reply, he shook his head in disgust and commed Markos Andropov.

“In a meeting, Sestos,” Markos replied tersely.

“Apologies, Governor, but you have a priority one at the house,” Giorgio replied.

“Handle it, Sestos. That’s what I pay you for. This meeting’s important,” Markos replied testily.

“Wish I could, Governor, but one of your private birds has flown the coop ... all the way to the station.”

The comm was silent, and Giorgio waited. He could imagine the turmoil roiling through the governor’s mind. He heard, “Coming,” before the comm abruptly ended.

* * * *

When Governor Markos Andropov arrived home, he found Giorgio had moved Dimitri’s body to a private room and had his man clean up the mess on the patio. The security chief’s briefing to Markos was terse and to the point.

“No doubt about it, Governor,” Giorgio said. “The girl mentally pushed him. The recording shows Dimitri was terrorized.”

“How can that be, Giorgio? Helena is an extremely weak empath. Why would her daughter be so strong?”

“I’ve no idea, Governor. There was no indication of it prior to this point,” Giorgio replied evenly, keeping a neutral expression on his face, even though he was lying.

“What about Sasha?” Markos asked, with concern.

“That’s a good question, Governor, but I wouldn’t be sure about how to go about investigating her strength. Right now, we need to think about Aurelia.” Giorgio needed the governor to focus on the bigger problem and to drop any inquiry into how Aurelia was capable of pushing Dimitri to his death. The last thing Giorgio wanted was to have the governor discover his secrets.

“You reached out to your contact on the station?” Markos asked.

“He’s been warned, but he was across the station, investigating a mining ship. She’ll probably have exited the El before our agent gets there.”

“Appearing as she does,” Markos said, examining the image of Aurelia on Giorgio’s comm unit, “and knowing nothing about the orbital platform, she’ll be easy to spot.”

“But what if she runs afoul of station security before our man recovers her?”

Markos stared at Giorgio, while he thought through his options. He couldn’t believe that this day had arrived, and he damned his sister for being unable to control her son. “I’m going to have to call a meeting and warn the others.”

“And tell them what, Governor?” Giorgio asked.

“I need their station assets, if we’re to recover Aurelia before she’s discovered or makes it to the *Belle*. And, if they’re going to help, they’ll want to know why they should. This thing could blow up in our faces and undo the delicate balance of power between us and the upsiders.”

“The family heads could throw you to station security as a sacrifice.”

“They could, Giorgio, and they know that we could do the same to them.”

* * * *

Markos Andropov fumed, fretted, sat down, jumped up, paced, and sat down again. In minutes, the dome’s power elite would descend on his home, and his secret that he’d kept for nearly two decades would be exposed. Worse, it was the type of explosive revelation that would endanger the Andropov dynasty that had governed Pyre’s domes since their inception.

The original patriarch, Andrei Andropov, wasn’t the greatest contributor to the construction fund for the North American Confederation’s (Sol-NAC) last colony ship, the *Honora Belle*. He was the

third, and his credits guaranteed seats for his family. Andrei made his fortune as a brilliant building engineer. It was he who designed the domes of Pyre, which kept the ash-ridden, sulfur-polluted air at bay. His inventive metal-silica transparent plates resisted the bombardment of the mild volcanic eruptions that still plagued Pyre, nearly three centuries after the colonists achieved orbit.

The Andropov family held the governorship of the domes ever since Andrei was first elected and now Markos was about to place the dynasty in jeopardy because of a rash decision to kidnap a young girl. He had been on station to see to the death ceremonies of his wife and brother-in-law, who were killed in a decompression accident, while they were inspecting a terminal arm.

The Andropov adults were engineers. That was the Pyrean discipline in greatest demand, and it kept the family in the forefront of society. In the case of Markos' wife and brother-in-law, they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Construction on the space station's shipping arms was a dangerous business.

Deep in misery, Markos found comfort in the attentions of a young, seventeen-year-old girl, Helena. She was a sensitive, a late-maturing empath, her powers so weak that she wasn't aware of her capabilities and hadn't been identified as a sensitive. People would characterize her as a girl whose personality lit up a room.

Helena was attracted to Markos' power and position, but she refused his offer to return downside with him, and mired in his grief, Markos committed a singular act of stupidity. He kidnapped her.

Helena was hidden in the Andropov house, where only a few, trusted, and well-compensated servants had access to her. Markos and his wife had chosen to put off having children until later in life, and left without an heir after his wife's death, Markos hoped to have a son with Helena, but she'd given him two daughters.

When Markos' sister, Liana, approached him, complaining again of her son's destructive and dark nature, Markos conceived the idea of making Aurelia a companion to his nephew. His hope was that Aurelia's capabilities could soothe Dimitri's provocative nature.

Although Dimitri wasn't told the nature of Markos' relationship to Aurelia, it didn't take the shrewd nephew long to discover the Andropov family's dark secret. He kept his knowledge from his uncle, but not from his cousin, Aurelia. Dimitri threatened her at every opportunity to enforce her silence.

That Aurelia possessed the power to push someone into killing themselves scared Markos, and he wondered again about Sasha. Worse, if Aurelia had that capability, she could easily convince station security of the veracity of her story of being held captive downside. While Markos ruminated on his choices, Giorgio knocked on his study's open door.

"Your guests are here, Governor Andropov," Giorgio announced formally.

"Show them in, Mr. Sestos," Markos replied. He crossed the room to warmly greet three more powerful family heads. Together with the Andropov family, they formed an unshakeable cabal that ruled the domes. "Friends, good of you to come on such short notice," Markos said. He tried to make them comfortable, offering seats and drinks.

"Let's dispense with the amenities, Markos," Rufus Stewart said, and remained standing as did the others. "Your comm said urgent."

"There's been a tragedy in my household, my friends. My nephew has been murdered," Markos replied, dutifully hanging his head.

Condolences came to Markos, as was expected, but he knew better. None of them were his friends, especially Lise Panoy, who pretended to be.

"Who did this?" Idrian Tuttle asked.

"A young woman in my household," Markos replied.

"Do you have her in custody?" Rufus Stewart asked.

"No, she escaped topside."

"Then station security will have her soon," Lise said. When she witnessed a pained expression cross Markos' face, she asked, "Markos, you did report her to the commandant?"

"I can't," Markos admitted, "and that's why I called this meeting. I need your help. More specifically, I need your assets on the station to help me recover the girl quickly and quietly."

Rufus scowled at Markos. The details weren't fitting together, and he became suspicious. "What's the servant's name?" Rufus asked, reaching for his comm unit.

"Don't bother looking, Rufus," Markos admitted. "She's not in the domes' registry."

"How can she not be registered?" Idrian asked loudly.

"She's a sensitive," Markos said.

"Markos, I thought you said she was a member of your household?" asked Lise, frowning and attempting to piece together Markos' disjointed comments. "You implied she's a downsider. Now, you say she's an empath, who, by the way, shouldn't be planetside."

Before Markos could reply, Idrian pointed an accusing finger at him and declared hotly, "You kidnapped this girl, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. I kidnapped her mother. Aurelia is my daughter," Markos said quietly. It felt as if his world emptied out of him — his secret, his future, and his family's dynasty.

"When ... when did you do this, Markos?" Lise asked quietly.

"Nearly eighteen years ago," Markos replied. "Helena's her name, and she's given me two daughters, Aurelia and Sasha,"

Markos' three guests stared at him in horror. The ramifications of what the governor had done and what it meant to the domes' elite families were too far-reaching to predict.

"Did Aurelia kill Dimitri physically?" Rufus asked. He was always the detailed-minded one.

"No. She's an extremely strong sensitive, unlike her mother. She terrorized Dimitri, who killed himself to end his torment."

"Wonderful, Markos," Idrian ground out. "You kidnap a woman, who gives you two daughters. Then you raise the girls in captivity in your house, without training and without realizing their powers. Now that the engine's red hot, you throw in plasma and introduce this powerful, untrained empath to someone we all know is rotten to the core. Then you're shocked and saddened when the girl retaliates against that piece of discharge you call a nephew."

"How could you be so stupid, Markos?" Rufus railed.

“Stop, all of you,” Lise said into the noise. “Shouting isn’t going to get us anywhere. What’s done might be one of the greatest mistakes ever committed, but it’s done, and we have to think about what it means to all of us and what we need to do to direct the outcome.”

“Please, friends, I need your help,” Markos pleaded. “Employ your assets on the station to find Aurelia and return her downside before station security locates her.”

“I agree that’s our priority,” Lise urged, but Rufus and Idrian looked unconvinced. “If station security gets to Aurelia first, what’s the commandant going to believe? That this was just the governor’s doing ... that for two decades we visited and dined at the governor’s house without knowing three women were held captive here? Damage control first, sirs. Then we can figure out what the families should do about this.”

Rufus and Idrian reluctantly agreed to Lise’s reasoning, and all three committed to Markos to use their station assets to locate Aurelia and secretly return her downside.

Lise briefly hugged Markos, assuring him that the families would work to mitigate the issue, and, as Giorgio led the three family heads from the house, Markos sat at his desk and wept.

At the door, Rufus and Idrian passed through first, and Lise spared a knowing glance for Giorgio, who tipped his head by the smallest increment.

Out on the ped-path, the three family heads caught a passing e-trans, and Rufus entered a priority code that would keep the transport from stopping along the way to their destination.

“Well, that certainly wasn’t the meeting I was expecting,” Idrian said from the back seat.

“Me neither,” Rufus acknowledged. “I thought you had Giorgio on the coin?” he asked Lise.

“I thought I did too,” Lise replied. “Just goes to show you that some secrets cost you more than you’re paying.”

“What’s the plan, Lise? Don’t tell me we’re going to help that idiot. We’ve got him right where we want him, and we can finally unseat the Andropov family from their lofty perch,” Idrian urged.

“I’m with Idrian, Lise,” Rufus agreed, “as long as the plan doesn’t get us in trouble with station security along with the Andropov family. What you said about what the commandant might think made sense to me.”

“Yes ... I was thinking about that,” Lise said, staring ahead at some teenagers laughing and cavorting on the ped-path and forcing the e-trans to navigate around them.

One of the girls in the group of teenagers flashed a rude hand sign at the passengers of a transport that slowed to ease by them, and she was prepared to do the same to the next one. But, at the last second, her hand froze when she locked eyes with Lise Panoy’s cold, blue stare. She yanked the boy on the outside of the group from the e-trans path and hissed a warning. The seven teens hurried to the side of the ped-path and managed to look as guilty as they could when the family heads passed. Of course, since they were teenagers, they were laughing and giggling about it moments after the e-trans, with its preeminent members, got out of hearing distance.

“I agree with Idrian,” Lise resumed. “This is our opportunity, but we have to protect ourselves, which means the commandant has to be made aware of the circumstances. He and I have a solid relationship, coin-wise. If I tell him what’s going on, he’ll let the investigation go forward as a hunt for a murderer, nothing more.”

“Then we help station security get ahold of Aurelia and discover she’s an empath. Then the wrath will fall on the governor,” Rufus reasoned.

“That means we keep our assets out of this, right?” Idrian asked.

“Absolutely,” Lise replied. “That fool gets no help from us, whatsoever.”

“What about the governor’s man, Sestos?” Rufus asked.

“He chose to keep this secret from us, which we could have used nine years ago when I recruited him on the coin,” Lise replied. “I say let him go under with Markos.” She grinned at Rufus and Idrian, who returned their own evil smiles.

* * * *

When Markos heard a soft knock at the door, he quickly dried his eyes and blew his nose. Having composed himself, he called for Giorgio to enter.

Giorgio could see that Markos was an emotional wreck, but events were moving too fast to let sentiment stand in the way of planning.

“What do you think they’re going to do?” Markos asked Giorgio, when his security chief plopped down in a chair across the desk from him.

“I think they’ll use this against us, Governor.”

“But they’ll have to be worried that their families could become embroiled too,” Markos protested.

“I agree, which means Lise will take steps to protect the other families, while we take the heat from station security.”

“Then you don’t think they’ll use their assets to find Aurelia and bring her back to me? What then? They find her and keep her for themselves so they can blackmail me?”

“That’s too soft an approach, Governor. Admittedly, Rufus and Idrian are the type to want to blow things up, but Lise is the strategist, which is why she offered me coin nearly a decade ago.”

“And now she knows you held out on her, Giorgio,” Markos said, with regret.

Giorgio quirked his mouth in reply, knowing that it was only a matter of time before this day arrived.

“What are our options, Giorgio?” Markos asked.

“You can be sure that Lise will activate her plan, whatever it is, shortly. It’s my bet that she’ll probably involve the commandant. She’ll find a way to engage station security to find Aurelia before our asset does. If she’s successful, then I think its game over for us.”

“If your asset gets to Aurelia first, then what?” Markos asked.

“Then you and I have to think about what to do next.”

“Meaning?”

“The three women have always been liabilities, which we sought to minimize. Now, our secret has been outed to the family heads, and we have to mitigate our exposure.”

“You’re saying we have to get rid of Helena and Sasha,” Markos said, appalled.

“You have to choose between them and your governorship, which includes your family and me, by the way.”

“If we recover Aurelia first, we can decide what to do then, but, if station security gets her first, then there’s nothing we can do,” Markos replied. “Think it through, Giorgio. If the commandant gets Aurelia in custody, he’ll have this powerful empath telling him this wild tale of being raised in captivity. But, because of what Lise will have told him, according to you, he’ll know that Aurelia’s story is true. The commandant will have to investigate, and he won’t come alone. You can bet Harbour will be accompanying him and his security force. Then it won’t matter if Helena and Sasha aren’t here. We can’t make the household disappear, and once the interviews start with Harbour in the room, she’ll perceive every little lie they tell. And don’t think you or I can hide from a trained and powerful empath like Harbour.”

Giorgio stood abruptly and headed toward the door.

“Where are you going?” Markos asked.

“To contact my asset with on-station security and see if he can enroll others to help him without spilling the entire story. It looks like the only way out of this mess is to spend as much coin as it takes to keep Aurelia out of the hands of station security.”

Glossary

Colony Ship

Arlene – Artisan leader

Beatrice “Birdie” Andrews – Comm operator on the *Belle*

Bryan Forshaw – Propulsion engineer on the *Belle*

Celia O’Riley – Former name of the current Harbour

Danny Thompson – Pilot on the *Belle*

Dingles – Nickname for Mitch Bassiter, first mate on the *Belle*

Harbour – Protector of the empaths, captain of the *Belle*, originally known as Celia O’Riley

Herbert McKinley – Medical spacer aboard the *Belle*

Lindsey Jabrook – Previous Harbour

Makana – Artisan who decorated Harbour’s skins

Nadine – Eldest active empath

Pete Jennings – Engineer and ex-spacer

Stacey Young – Medical spacer aboard the *Belle*

Yardley – Blind artisan, who works in metalcraft

Yasmin – Harbour’s closest friend, empath

Downsiders

Andrei Andropov – Founder of the Andropov dynasty

Aurelia – Eldest daughter of Helena, also known as Rules

Dimitri Belosov – Son of Liana Belosov and the governor’s nephew

Gerald – Tech at El landing pad

Giorgio Sestos – Governor’s head of security

Helena Garmenti – Kidnapped by the governor, mother of Aurelia and Sasha

Idrian Tuttle – Dome family head

Liana Belosov – Sister of Markos Andropov

Lise Panoy – Dome family head, later governor of domes

Markos Andropov – Governor of Pyre’s domes

Rufus Stewart – Dome family head

Sasha – Younger daughter of Helena, Aurelia’s sister

Spacers

Angelina “Angie” Mendoza – First mate on the *Pearl*

Belinda Kilmer – Third mate on the *Pearl*, later second mate on the *Marianne*

Buttons – Crew member aboard the *Spryte*

Claudia Manning – *Spryte*’s shuttle pilot

Corbin Rose – Captain of the *Marianne*, bequeathed his ship to Cinders

Darrin “Nose” Fitzgibbon – First mate on the *Marianne*

Hamoi – Assay tech on the *Marianne*

Ituau Tulafono – First mate aboard the *Spryte*

Jeremy Kinsman – Navigator aboard the *Spryte*

Jessie Cinders – Owner of a mining company and captain of the *Spryte*

Kasey – Tech aboard the *Spryte*

Leonard Hastings – Captain of the *Pearl*

Mitch Bassiter – Known as Dingles, first mate on the *Belle*

Nate Mikado – Second mate aboard the *Spryte*

Orson – Shelter tech on the *Marianne*

Oscar – Assay engineer on the *Marianne*

Schaefer – Second mate on the *Marianne*, then traded to the *Pearl*

Sima Madigan – Mining captain on the *Dauntless*

Tobias Samuels – Lead excavation engineer on the *Marianne*

Tully – Survey engineer on the *Marianne*

Yohlin Erring – Captain of the *Marianne*

Stationers or Topsiders

Bondi – Member of the Review Board

Bowden – Officer in station security

Cecilia Lindstrom – Corporal in station security, later promoted to sergeant

Devon Higgins – Lieutenant in station security

Emerson Strattleford – Commandant of the JOS

Evan Pendleton – YIPS manager

Gabriel – Latched On store owner

Henry Stamerson – Head of the Review Board, retired mining captain
JD – El car freight crewman
Liam Finian – Major in station security
Maggie – Hostess of the Miners’ Pit, ex-spacer
Miguel Rodriguez – Sergeant in station security
Nunez – Officer in station security
Pena – Young girl who Toby likes
Penelope – Terminal arm 2 manager
Phillip Borden – Groundskeeper employed by downsiders
Rules – Sasha’s nickname for Aurelia
Sam – Terminal arm 4 manager
Stephen Jenkels – Engineer and architect of the orbital station, the JOS
Terrell “Terror” McKenzie – Corporal in station security, and Giorgio Sestos’ asset
Toby – Boy in wheelchair awaiting BRC surgery

Vac Suits

Frances – Jeremy’s suit name
Jessie – Aurelia’s suit name
Spryte – Jessie’s suit name

Objects, Terms, and Cantinas

Bender – Slang for empath
BNNT – Tiny, nanotubes made of carbon, boron, and nitrogen, interspersed with hydrogen for insulation
BRC – Bone replacement copy, pronounced “brick”
Caf drink – A mix of artificially grown coffee and cocoa with a mild stimulant
Cap – Transportation capsule
C-chip ring – Coin carrying/transfer system housed on a ring
Coin – Reference to electronic currency
Coin-kat or coin-kitty – Male or female sex service provider
Comm-dot – Communications ear-wig that relays to a comm unit or trans-stick

DAD – DNA analysis device

DBs – Refers to the people who live in the domes

Deck shoes – Shoes with patterned bottoms, which allow people's feet to adhere to decks

Downside – Refers to the domes on Pyre

E-cart – Electric cargo transport

El – Elevator car linked between the orbital station and Pyre's domes

Empath – Person capable of sensing and manipulating the emotional states of others

E-trans – Electric passenger transport

Green – Replenishing drink for the empath's

Latched On – Spacer supply house

Mag-boots – Boots that hold vac suited spacers to ship decks

Miners' Pit – Cantina owned by Jessie Cinders

Mist mask – Makeup mask

Mist wipe – Removes makeup

Normals – Individuals who have no empath capability

Ped-path – Walking and electric vehicle transport surface in the domes

Pull – Empaths term for reading the emotions of another

Push – Empath term for affecting the emotions of another

Review Board – Judicial body aboard the JOS

Rose's Reward – Used in the negative to mean an unsuccessful trip

Sensitives – Preferred alternate name for empath's

Shock stick – Weapon carried by JOS security personnel

Skins – Preferred clothing of stationers and spacers

Sleepholds – Places for people to temporarily bunk

Slip boots – Used to protect the feet inside mag-boots

Starlight – Expensive JOS cantina

Stationers – People who live on the Jenkels Orbital Station

Trans-stick – Pyrean fashion, which function as a transmitter

Vac suit – Spacer's vacuum work suit

Stars, Planets, and Moons

Crimsa – Star of the planet Pyre

Emperion – Pyre’s second moon

Minist – Pyre’s first and smallest moon

Pyre – New home world of Sol-NAC colonists

Triton – Pyre’s third and largest moon

Ships and Stations

Dauntless – Mining ship, Sima Madigan captain

Honora Belle – Colony ship, also known as the *Belle*

Jenkels Orbital Station – Station above Pyre and anchors the El car to downside, nicknamed the JOS, pronounced “joss.”

Marianne – Captain Jessie Cinders’ first ship, referred to as the *Annie*, willed to him by Corbin Rose

Spryte – Captain Jessie Cinders’ third ship

Unruly Pearl – Captain Jessie Cinders’ second ship, referred to as the *Pearl*, willed to him by Corbin Rose

Yellen-Inglehart Processing Station – Mineral and gas processing platform called the YIPS, pronounced “yips.”

My Books

Empath, the first novel in this new series, the Pyreans, is available in e-book and softcover editions. Please visit my website, <http://scottjucha.com>, for publication locations. You may register at my website to receive e-mail updates on the progress of my upcoming novels.

Pyrean Series

Empaths

Messinants (coming 2018)

The Silver Ships Series

The Silver Ships

Libre

Méridien

Haraken

Sol

Espero

Allora

Celus-5

Omnia

Vinium (coming 2018)

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 more than three decades 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 was titled *The Lure* and 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. In early 2014, I chose to devote my efforts to writing full-time. My first novel, *The Silver Ships*, was released in February 2015. The series, with the release of *Omnia*, now numbers nine.

The new series, Pyreans, relates the tale of a third Earth colony ship and gives readers an opportunity to follow new characters, who struggle to overcome the obstacles of a world tortured by geologic upheaval. Humans are divided into camps — downsiders, stationers, spacers, and the *Belle's* inhabitants, which consist of empaths and the discarded.

My deep appreciation goes out to the many readers who embraced the Silver Ships series and its characters. I hope you've enjoyed the start of the new series!