

RACE RIVALRY

Gate Ghosts Book 3

S. H. JUCHA

*Chapters 1 & 2
Excerpt*

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

Copyright © 2022 by S. H. Jucha

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

Published by Hannon Books, Inc.

www.scottjucha.com

ISBN: 978-1-7375537-2-4 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-7375537-3-1 (softcover)

First Edition: January 2022

Cover Design: Damon Za

Acknowledgments

Race Rivalry is the third novel in the [Gate Ghosts](#) series, which relates the stories of the descendants of Earth's fourth colony ship.

I wish to extend a special thanks to my independent editor, Joni Wilson, whose efforts enabled the finished product. To my proofreaders, Abiola Streete, David Melvin, Ron Critchfield, Pat Bailey, Tiffany Crutchfield, and Jwayne, I offer my sincere thanks for their support.

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

Glossary

A glossary is located at the end of the book.

Contents

1: Conglomerate.....	1
2: Anomaly's Surprise.....	12
3: Harlyn's Message.....	22
4: Ceda's Thoughts.....	32
5: Hacker Hunt.....	44
6: Julien.....	54
7: Nira's Offer.....	64
8: Samuel's Phase Two.....	75
9: Phase Three.....	86
10: An Unlikely Visitor.....	101
11: Lisa's Tour.....	112
12: Teaching Moments.....	127
13: Dome Foundations.....	137
14: Lazama's Revenge.....	151
15: Deadly Encounter.....	162
16: <i>Vivian's Reflection</i>	178
17: Disruptions.....	189
18: Samuel's Fate.....	199
19: Council's Surprise.....	212
20: Evolve or Devolve.....	227
21: Clone Demands.....	238
22: <i>Reflection's View</i>	248
23: Who's Signaling?.....	260
24: Upgrades.....	271
25: Imperium Appointees.....	284
26: Numerals.....	295
27: Story Time.....	308
28: Nira's Gifts.....	321
29: Repair Intimidation.....	336
30: <i>Reflection's Return</i>	347
31: Vortex Mysteries.....	358
32: Alien Probe.....	369

33: Densing Detection	380
34: Double Trouble	393
35: Jubilation	407
Glossary	421
My Books	429
The Author	431

1: Conglomerate

KILMER, DAIMLER SYSTEM PURE POUR PLANET

“We’re listening,” Miriamal said. She and other Beta One sisters had sailed to Kilmer aboard the *Dominance* to hear the requests of the assembled chairpersons.

At Miriamal’s invitation, Chairpersons Lisa Dyehouse, Karl Denham, and Frank Allbers had joined the sisters aboard their ship.

“We’re loath to make the announcements you request about the conglomerate’s formation and the alliance of our three mining worlds with your sisters,” Lisa said.

<She has an alternative,> Galena sent to Miriamal and Helena. <Why doesn’t she offer it to us?>

<I believe you’re correct in your estimation,> Helena replied. <She tests us.>

<Why?> Galena inquired.

<Chairperson Dyehouse wishes to understand to what lengths we’ll go to support the conglomerate alliance,> Miriamal sent.

Using a human gesture, Miriamal spread her hands to Lisa to indicate the chairperson should continue.

“The conglomerate’s purpose is expansion, but there aren’t many known wormholes left to explore,” Lisa said. “The most promising one is located close to this system. An investigation by your ship should quickly inform us of the worthiness of our enterprise.”

<She is a worthy ally or opponent, depending on future events,> Helena commented to her sisters.

“If we discover a suitable system to exploit, we’ll expect the twin announcements to be made immediately,” Miriamal said.

“Understood and agreed,” Lisa replied.

“The journey will be swift through the anomaly,” Miriamal said. “However, we’ll rely on passive data accumulation. That will require time.”

“You can reposition your ship through space extremely quickly,” Karl pointed out. “Why not move it close to any system you spot? That would severely decrease the monitoring time, wouldn’t it?”

The sisters were careful to limit their vocal responses to the humans to soft chuckles. Whereas, they’d sent jangling and clashing sounds to one another.

“We didn’t expect to discover your race when we exited the Satchel anomaly,” Helena replied. “Humans in this area of space have believed they were alone for many centuries, but the galaxy is crowded with hundreds of races. Traveling via the anomalies presents an increased possibility of discovering other races. It pays to be careful.”

What Helena didn’t say was that the Omnians had encountered many a well-armed and dangerous race, and the sisters were ill-prepared to handle contentious encounters.

“Can you estimate the amount of time the journey would take you?” Frank asked.

<The human has an ulterior motive for the question,> Galena shared. <I’m tempted to shake it out of him.>

<Galena, should I have requested you remain on Beta One with Theda?> Miriamal admonished.

<I’m adjusting my responses now,> Galena replied. She was referring to her tendency to harshly verbalize her reactions to the humans, and Miriamal and Helena knew that.

“Why are you inquiring about the length of time that we’ll be gone?” Miriamal asked. Rather than focus on Frank, she directed her question to Lisa.

“We wish to sail with you,” Lisa replied.

“We would hear why that’s important to you,” Helena said. To Lisa’s querying frown, she replied, “It’s not that you wouldn’t be welcome aboard the *Dominance*, but we wish to understand your motivation.”

<Perhaps they don’t trust what we’ll report,> Galena volunteered to her sisters.

“We’ll be risking our companies and our personal livelihood,” Lisa replied. “Much depends on what you find. We want to witness the discoveries not just watch imagery that you might record.”

<A credible response,> Helena commented to Miriamal and Galena.

“Are you prepared to sail?” Miriamal inquired.

“We’ll be ready tomorrow morning,” Lisa replied.

“Then Helena will escort you to the bay and return you planetside,” Miriamal said. She offered her hand to the chairpersons, and then Galena and she swiftly exited the conference room.

On Kilmer, the humans were deposited in the landing pad’s engineering bay airlock, and the sisters returned to their traveler. The chairpersons kept quiet until they reached Lisa’s apartment.

“I’ll never get used to walking on the surface,” Frank opined, as he settled into a comfortable chair, and Lisa served hot caf.

“What do you think the sisters thought of our request?” Karl asked Lisa.

“I think they took it for how it was meant,” Lisa replied.

“That we don’t trust them,” Frank sought to confirm.

“I’m sure that there was that aspect in their thoughts,” Lisa replied, “but now they know that we want a close relationship. As Miriamal noted, trust will come with actions that prove intent.”

“What will determine whether we go forward with the conglomerate?” Frank asked.

“What is it you want to say, Frank?” Karl queried.

“I’m wondering what size of discovery will warrant us announcing our alliance with the sisters and throwing our race into subjugation,” Frank replied.

“Interesting way of phrasing your concern,” Karl remarked. “Are you having second thoughts?”

“No,” Frank replied adamantly. “I’m pointing out to both of you that initiation of the conglomerate requires something substantial.”

“I’m in agreement with that,” Lisa replied, sipping deeply on her caf. “That’s one of the reasons I wanted to sail with the sisters. They’ll be viewing the systems and the worlds on the wormhole’s far side for their needs. We need to be doing the same thing.”

The following morning, the chairpersons repeated the previous day’s exercise. They met the sisters in the engineering bay, donned their environment suits, and exited the bay for the airless surface.

As Lisa crossed the airless space to the waiting traveler in the company of a sister, she was reminded of Frank’s comment about walking on the surface. She disliked exiting the comfort and safety of the domes. No thought was given to the miners who toiled deep under the domes and risked exposure to myriad tunnel disasters.

Exiting the *Dominance’s* bay, the chairpersons were surprised to be taken by Galena on a new route upward in the ship.

“Where are we going?” Karl inquired.

“To medical,” Galena replied. “Some humans are susceptible to our transits in and out of the dark. We’ve a means of relieving their pain.”

The chairpersons halted and stared at Galena.

“How do you relieve the pain?” Frank asked. His voice trembled.

“I assure you that the procedure is painless,” Galena replied. “A small device called an inducer is placed against the temple. You’ll sleep for the duration of the journey through the dark.”

Frank nervously regarded his companions.

“You’ve two other options,” Galena offered. “You may suffer debilitating discomfort for the period of time that we’re within the dark, or you may return planetside.”

“Get a grip, Frank,” Karl said. “Lead on, Galena.”

Galena exited the lift and continued down the corridor. Her rearward sensors monitored Chairperson Allbers, who stood rooted in place. Before the trio entered the medical suite, she saw the lagging chairperson shudder and hurry to catch up.

Three sisters directed the chairpersons to lie on tables. Then Galena communicated to Miriamal that the humans were ready to transit.

Helena had already launched the *Dominance* high above the Daimler ecliptic. The ship was oriented toward the unexplored anomaly.

In the medical suite, the sisters monitored the ship's controller. They knew when the ship accelerated and the precise second when it transited.

Lisa gritted her teeth as the transit effect knifed through her nerves. Then the disturbance passed.

Karl squeezed his eyes shut and belched. Then he was through it.

Frank groaned. His hands gripped the table's edges, and his body repeatedly jerked.

Instantly, a sister placed the inducer on Frank's temple, and he lay quiet.

Lisa and Karl sat up and regarded Frank.

"It appears that Frank had cause to be concerned," Karl commented.

"There is no means of predicting which biological will react badly to the transit's effect," Galena said. "Those who suffer are a small proportion of any race, but precautions must be taken for every individual."

"Should we wait here?" Lisa inquired.

"Our journey to the mouth of the anomaly will be quick. Then we'll release Chairperson Allbers," Galena replied.

Lisa and Karl waited silently. They had no intention of discussing company business in the sisters' presence.

When the sisters and the chairpersons detected the transit's exit, Frank was released from the inducer. He jerked upright and stared around, his eyes wild.

"Relax, Frank," Lisa said soothingly. "It's all over. We entered the dark and came out. You had a bad reaction, and your sister put you to sleep."

"What did you two feel?" Frank inquired, trying to calm his anxiety at having been at the mercy of alien bots.

"It's not pleasant," Lisa remarked, "but it passed quickly."

"I thought I was about to experience a bout of food poisoning, and then it was over," Karl added.

“Chairperson Allbers, anytime that a sister requests you report to medical, you must follow her,” Galena said. “Am I understood?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Frank grumped. He hated submitting to the sisters’ care, but, what he had initially experienced, he never wanted to feel again.

“These sisters will lead you to your cabins and will attend to your needs,” Galena said.

“Wait,” Karl requested. “How will we summon them?”

“You mistake my instructions,” Galena replied. “Your sister will wait outside your cabin. The three of you are unable to signal your cabin doors. Therefore, they must remain open for the entire journey.”

When Galena didn’t receive another question, she swiftly exited.

<Not the best performance,> Helena sent to Galena.

<I preferred caring for the miners’ medical concerns,> Galena sent. <I perceive them as assets who need nurturing. These three individuals live in comfort and want for nothing.>

<Yet, they’re the means by which we can preserve and grow the Sisterhood,> Helena pointed out.

<I didn’t say that I wouldn’t care for them too,> Galena objected. <Simply put, I’d rather not.>

Helena shared the exchange with Miriamal and suggested another sister manage the daily contact with the chairpersons.

<Negative,> Miriamal sent in reply. <If we’re to succeed, then it’s imperative that first-gen sisters develop a supportive manner of dealing with humans, especially the powerful ones.>

The *Dominance* entered the anomaly and soon passed through it. Then Helena rapidly decelerated the ship until all forward motion ceased. With no other duties to perform, most sisters locked their avatars and waited. Only the three sisters on duty at the humans’ cabins were required to act.

Lisa invited her sister into the cabin and asked her to be seated.

“What do I call you?” Lisa asked.

“I’m Felicity,” the sister replied.

“Where are we now?” Lisa inquired.

“We’ve exited the anomaly, and the ship holds station,” Felicity replied.

This was Felicity's first in-depth interaction with a human critical to the sisters. She remained linked to Miriamal and Helena for support.

"Is this part of the process of being careful in a new area of space?" Lisa asked.

"Undoubtedly," Felicity replied.

"But you didn't have that luxury when you exited the Satchel wormhole, did you?" Lisa pressed.

After a quick consult with her sisters, Felicity replied, "That would be correct. The SADEs were chasing us."

"The SADEs have found you. Yet, you remain in our region," Lisa pointed out.

<Does Chairperson Dyehouse believe that she speaks only to Felicity?> Helena sent to Miriamal.

<By my estimation, she doesn't,> Miriamal replied. <I believe she views Felicity as a conduit to us.>

"Why do you believe you've the upper hand over the SADEs?" Lisa questioned.

"Several factors enabled us to succeed and prevent our ousting," Felicity replied. "We arrived at Beta Two with a headstart on the *Alexander*. This was critical. After a manufacturing implementation on that planet, we migrated much of our resources to Beta One. We now have produced a sufficient number of sisters to hold that planet."

"How many?" Lisa interrupted.

"Nearly four hundred," Felicity replied, not bothering to quote the exact number that had been produced at the time of the *Dominance's* launch. "The final factor is the isolation of mining populations within domes. This gives us leverage. In addition, we deny the SADEs easy access to the citizens, who are maintained in a precarious state."

"Why do you say leverage? Haven't you displaced the company executive?" Lisa inquired.

"We have, but our efforts please Chairperson Lazama," Felicity replied.

"That might not be as useful as you suppose," Lisa remarked. She noted the momentary freeze in Felicity's facial expressions.

When Felicity returned to the here and now, she said tersely, “Explain,” in a tone that proved to Lisa that her conversation had been shared.

“Are you not aware of the events that have taken place on Naiad due to the SADEs’ visit?” Lisa inquired.

“Your question doesn’t serve as an answer to our request,” Felicity replied in that directed manner.

“Miriamal, that’s too much to cover in a single sitting,” Lisa said, choosing to speak directly to the sisters’ leader. “I intend to refresh myself and then get something to eat. However, before I do, I’ve a final question. Have I heard everything that you believe represents your advantages over the SADEs?”

“There is one more item,” Felicity replied. “Our best protection stems from the SADEs themselves.”

“How so?” Lisa prompted.

“The SADEs’ ethics prevent them from endangering biologicals, if at all possible,” Felicity explained. “If they try to extricate us from Beta One, they might cause the population harm.”

“How would the citizens be harmed?” Lisa queried.

“That’s the unknown question for the SADEs, isn’t it?” Felicity responded.

Suddenly, the concept clicked for Lisa, and she said, “The SADEs are unsure to what lengths you’d go to protect your foothold on the planet.”

“Precisely,” Felicity replied.

“Then you’re prepared to risk the Beta One humans,” Lisa prompted.

“Are you asking us to place the well-being of humans over our kind?” Felicity inquired.

Lisa had noticed that Felicity’s facial expression had hardened. There didn’t seem to be a reason to pursue her line of questioning any further. Felicity and the other sisters had made it clear that they didn’t value human life equal to their existence, much less above theirs. The SADEs would be right to hesitate forcefully ejecting the sisters from a planet’s domes.

“If you’ll excuse me,” Lisa said, rising from the table. She gestured toward the open cabin door, and Felicity accepted the hint.

Later, in the meal room, Lisa sat at a small table with the other chairpersons, while the three companion sisters served them food and water.

When the sisters took up positions a discreet distance away, Karl addressed them. "We'd like privacy, please," and he indicated the meal room's exit. Dutifully, the three sisters moved to the corridor.

"Have you spoken with your sister companions?" Karl asked Lisa and Frank.

"I had a long conversation with Felicity," Lisa replied. "It was illuminating."

"I didn't realize they don't have a clue about what's happened on Naiad and why the three of us are out here on the rim," Karl said hurriedly.

"I didn't either," Lisa replied, while she ate quickly. She hadn't realized that she'd gotten that hungry. Although, the taste of the food was unsatisfying.

Between bites, Karl asked, "Did you notice that your companion sometimes doesn't sound like herself?"

"They're sharing," Lisa replied. "I think they're doing that all the time."

"We work hard to ensure privacy, and the sisters do the opposite," Karl responded, shaking his head at the absurdity.

"Frank, what did your sister have to say?" Lisa inquired.

"Didn't talk to her," Frank replied. He continued to eat, as if there was nothing else to be said about the matter.

Karl glanced at Lisa, and she surreptitiously touched her temple, and he nodded in understanding. Frank was still reacting negatively to being put under by the sisters. He hated the idea of losing control.

When the chairpersons finished eating, Miriamal swept into the room, accompanied by the companion sisters. The timing of Miriamal's arrival made the chairpersons wonder if their conversations had been overheard.

"I would learn what has transpired on Naiad," Miriamal said, taking a seat at the small table, while the other sisters cleaned up the table.

For the next few days, while the *Dominance's* powerful antennas collected telemetry, the chairpersons educated the sisters about the events

that had impacted the council, the courts, Naiad security, and the general population.

Miriamal allowed her guests time to eat, rest, refresh, and not much more. There was too much that she wanted to learn. When she'd exhausted the chairpersons' information, she indicated that their time was now their own.

<The SADEs are inventive,> Helena praised, after ordering the disparate chairperson conversations into a logical timeline.

<They always manage to find ways to influence biologicals that don't occur to us,> Galena allowed.

<It stems from the extensive amount of time that the SADEs, who were first to be freed, spent with the Omnians,> Miriamal replied. <They acquired an intimate understanding of biological motivations.>

For several more days, the sisters digested the hours of conversations acquired from the chairpersons about Naiad. While they weren't concerned that Naiad would prove to be a long-term problem, they spent time comparing the enormous differences between the home planet's culture and that of the mining worlds.

The focus of the *Dominance's* antennas had been on a distant star. Through passive collection, the system's worlds had finally clearly resolved, and the sisters studied the details.

For the chairpersons, there was no sense of the ship's movement. They were unaware that the *Dominance* had reversed its position and was headed back into the anomaly.

The first inkling of the unusual circumstances came when the chairpersons were interrupted in Lisa's cabin.

Frank's sister companion appeared and said, "Chairperson Allbers, you're required in medical. We'll be entering the dark."

"We're transiting to a nearby system?" Lisa inquired eagerly.

"Negative," the sister replied. "We've exited the anomaly and will be making for the Daimler system."

"I need to speak with Miriamal," Lisa demanded, rising from the table.

"Your request has been relayed," the sister said. "Chairperson Allbers, please hurry. You don't want a repeat of your bad experience."

Frank glanced at the other chairpersons, shrugged, and followed the sister.

Lisa and Karl waited impatiently for Miriamal to summon them. Every request to a sister companion was politely returned with a response to wait.

Soon after the second transit's thrumming of the nerves passed, Frank returned to Lisa's cabin, and the chairpersons were escorted to the *Dominance's* bridge.

Borrowing the sisters' oft-used phrase, Lisa said, "We're listening."

2: Anomaly's Surprise

“While this development wasn't unexpected, as we warned you, the odds against a discovery of this kind were enormous,” Miriamal replied.

“A little more detail, please,” Frank requested with pique.

The bridge holo-vid lit, and a wire model of a star and a system appeared.

“The anomaly's exit isn't near this star,” Miriamal explained. “It would be an inconvenient distance for your Axis-ships to travel. We held station off the anomaly to collect details of the system's bodies. This is the telling feature that was discovered.”

The wire model was replaced by a view of a planet and its higher orbit.

There were substantial intakes of breaths from the chairpersons.

“It's ... it's inhabited,” Frank stuttered.

Karl's brow furrowed. The imagery's clarity was astounding, but it certainly didn't require a stating of the obvious.

“What's your analysis of what we're seeing?” Lisa asked.

<A creditable question,> Helena commented privately to Miriamal.

“The planet's society is in early stages of space exploration,” Miriamal replied.

“But those ships!” Frank objected.

Lisa glowered at Frank, and he took the hint and shut up.

“The satellites orbiting the planet are indicative of the citizens' construction techniques,” Miriamal continued. “We examined the near and far planets and moons in the systems for evidence of the populace's expansion. There were none.”

Helena shifted the holo-vid to display a magnified view of one of two large ships. “As to the three ships that are seen,” she said, “their construction indicates an advanced star-traveling race.”

“Why's the quality of this particular image degraded?” Karl inquired.

“We retreated when we observed these ships,” Galena said. “There was no reason to collect fine details. There was every reason to leave. Although, we suspect that it didn’t do us any good.”

“Let’s put aside the analysis of the civilization and these ships, for the moment,” Lisa proposed. “Obviously, the presence of these starships means something to you that we don’t comprehend. As Frank said, we need more detail.”

“The starship race might not have known of the nearby anomaly,” Miriamal replied. “They might have just discovered the local race. Whatever the circumstances, we suspect that their technical individuals will soon be aware of the appearance of our ship, and our exit and entry to and from the anomaly.”

“Which means what?” Karl queried.

“To star-faring races, our appearance and disappearance will represent a curiosity,” Helena explained. “Sooner or later, they’ll investigate.”

“Which means they’ll appear outside the Daimler system,” Lisa surmised.

“Precisely,” Miriamal said.

“Tell us what you surmise about the ships,” Lisa requested.

“There are two opinions that describe the larger pair of ships,” Galena replied. “They’re armed vessels. By the number of ports secreted along their streamlined bodies, we estimate that they’re tremendously powerful warships. They can either be used by a race for peacekeeping or conquering.”

“There is a mitigating factor,” Helena added. “The third ship, the small one, is unarmed, and it speaks to the presence of the race’s intelligentsia. This doesn’t determine the race’s ultimate purpose, but it does indicate that the technologically superior society would prefer to accrue worlds peacefully rather than decimate the local citizenry.”

“You’ve chosen to vacate that area of space rather quickly,” Karl noted. “Admittedly, you’ve explained your concerns, but you haven’t said how the discovery of this world and these ships change your plans or affect your association with the proposed conglomerate.”

“Unknown,” Miriamal replied.

“What if the purpose of the conglomerate was to help the sisters with the defense of the rim planets?” Lisa proposed.

Karl and Frank were taken aback by Lisa’s suggestion, and their surprise was written on their faces.

Miriamal’s quiet stare informed Lisa that the sisters were communicating.

“You can build warships, can’t you?” Lisa prompted.

“We have that capability,” Miriamal replied. “Unfortunately, you’ve no experience in war, which means you don’t understand the risks.”

“Educate us,” Lisa proffered.

“You’ve seen three superior ships, but you know little of their occupants,” Miriamal replied. “Are the ships occupied by a single race, or are they crewed by multiple races? Perhaps there’s a large confluence of races that expands across a massive territory, and they say to each new race, ‘Assimilate or perish.’ These things should be known before we consider whether to build warships to defend your territory.”

“Why would you want to protect us?” Karl asked.

“Permanent submission of your race,” Miriamal swiftly replied. “In that event, you would direct the SADEs to leave.”

“And never return,” Frank added lamely.

“Negative,” Galena replied firmly.

“Interesting response,” Lisa commented, and she eyed Miriamal for an explanation.

“If we were to govern humans here, there might come a time when our defense was inadequate,” Miriamal explained. “The SADEs and their biological allies possess vast fleets. You might want to have Cremsyron leave behind the means to call for help.”

“Why would the SADEs return after we’d thrown them out?” Karl inquired.

Miriamal’s smile was sad, and it wasn’t feigned. The discussion’s irony hadn’t escaped her. “You’re humans. The SADEs understand your foibles. Irrational as biologicals can be, the SADEs are especially dedicated to preserving humankind wherever found.”

“And that would be because ...?” Frank queried.

“The SADEs were freed from their boxes by a mix of humans, Méridiens and New Terrans,” Helena replied. “As SADEs, they’ll never forget the gift they were given.”

“Suppose we could convince Jason Lazama of X-Ore and Denise Bell of CenGas of the peril that could befall us from this superior race or races,” Lisa said. “Whether Naiad agrees or not will be immaterial. The five companies could form the conglomerate and offer to be governed by the sisters. With your presently limited sources, what could the capabilities of five companies do to buy time for you to prepare for a better defense?”

<I like the female human’s thinking,> Galena sent to her sisters. <She seeks to keep her plan on course, while assimilating new challenges. We should consider her to be the figurehead of whatever organizational structure we create.>

“If we’re strategizing about defense, there’s an obvious choke point against hostile forces,” Miriamal said. Her kernel processes were working overtime to gauge the values of remaining in human space, dominating the society, and becoming humankind’s protectors.

“You’re referring to the wormhole exit,” Lisa surmised. Then she added hopefully, “You could station a warship there and destroy any vessel that came through.”

The sisters’ quick laughter dashed Lisa’s enthusiasm.

“You must focus on the politics, Chairperson Dyehouse,” Miriamal admonished. “As I indicated before, you know nothing about war. A warship could come through the anomaly at a velocity that could easily escape our fire, or the enemy could flood the anomaly with hundreds of warships. Where would we be then?”

“My apologies, Miriamal,” Lisa replied contritely. “You’re right. We know nothing of defending ourselves from much more than third-party assault groups.”

“And you’ve a poor record with that level of aggression,” Galena commented sarcastically.

<Galena,> Miriamal sent, <I believe you can best support Theda the next time the *Dominance* sails from Beta One.>

Galena considered replying but chose to remain quiet. She was reminded of Peña's abandonment of their sect and the resulting opportunity for her. Where there were once five first-gen sisters from the *Dominance*, there were now only four. Furthermore, she surmised that Theda coveted Miriamal's lead position.

It suited Galena to wait and watch. If fortune favored her, Miriamal and Theda's future altercations might give her the chance to join Helena and share the leadership role.

"Where do we go from here?" Karl asked.

"We return you planetside, and we sail for Beta One," Miriamal replied. "There's much for the sisters to consider. We'll contact you when we've come to a consensus about what we wish to do."

Lisa had hundreds of more questions, but the sisters politely led them to a traveler.

"We've one admonition for you," Helena said before the chairpersons boarded the ship. "We require that you don't speak to others about what you've learned. Is this understood?"

"We hear your request," Lisa said, which didn't satisfy the sisters at all.

After boarding the traveler, the chairpersons were swiftly deposited in the engineering bay adjacent to the Kilmer landing pad. As usual, they waited until they reached Lisa's apartment before they spoke to one another.

Immediately, Lisa ordered a meal to be served. Then the trio retired to a study for privacy.

"Centuries of slow painful growth in isolation," Karl commented. "Then, in the space of months, we encounter multiple alien races. Four, if you count the SADEs and sisters as two."

"And who's to know which of these races might truly be on our side," Frank replied.

"By 'our side,' do you mean humans or just the three of us?" Karl asked sharply.

"A little testy, aren't we?" Frank shot back.

"Calm down," Lisa instructed. "While the sisters do their thinking, we need to do some of our own."

“What side do you think the sisters will take when they make their final decision?” Karl asked.

“Their own,” Lisa replied curtly. “At one point, we had balance. The sisters wanted to rule the rim, and we had the conglomerate and potential exploration. That equilibrium has been upset.”

“If that’s the case, then the sisters will probably put their efforts into self-protection,” Frank mused. “We’ll know that if they start putting us off by delaying the investigation of other wormholes.”

“Good points,” Lisa acknowledged.

“Then where does that leave us?” Karl inquired. “Our original thoughts of retiring to the rim aren’t appropriate anymore. Not with star-faring aliens on the other side of a single wormhole.”

“I think our futures lie in saving our rear ends, and I don’t think we can count on Miriamal and her kind to do it,” Lisa remarked.

“What about Miriamal’s comment about the SADEs?” Frank asked.

“What do you mean?” Karl inquired.

“She said ... and I think she was being ironic ... that we could always turn to the SADEs for protection,” Frank reminded his companions. “She said they had an affinity for humans, who had freed their kind.”

“Okay?” Karl replied dubiously. “What exactly are you suggesting?”

“I thought it was obvious. I’m saying we talk to the SADEs, and tell them what we saw on the other end of a single loop from Kilmer,” Frank stated earnestly.

Karl drew breath to laugh, but Lisa interrupted him.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Lisa said thoughtfully. “This is no longer about business expansion. It might well be a matter of domination, in which every human is found at society’s bottom, and that would include us. Worse, it could be about our survival.”

“How would you make contact?” Karl asked. “The sisters told us that they’re monitoring the rim’s messages.”

“It would have to be direct contact,” Lisa replied.

“You’d have to travel incognito,” Frank proposed. “Also, we’d have to be careful to cover your absence.”

“That means your slate would have to stay here in case Miriamal sends a message,” Karl added. “This would probably be a six- to seven-week round trip.”

“I wonder what Miriamal would think if she found out that you’d visited the SADEs,” Frank mused.

Lisa laughed lightly. “She’d probably approve of us covering our contingencies.”

“Then what was Helena’s admonition about not sharing the discovery?” Karl asked.

“Hard to say,” Lisa replied. “I think it was the sisters looking out for their welfare, and we need to do the same.”

“I’ve one final thought for you, Lisa,” Frank said. “You do remember where the SADEs are located.”

“Yes, Delhart,” Lisa replied quietly.

“Your welcome there could be colder than the surface ice,” Frank posited.

“I think that’s where I would have to rely on the SADEs. I would want to be assured that I was their guest not that of Denise Bell,” Lisa said. “With the SADEs’ capabilities, I’d think they’d be ahead of any CenGas machinations against me.”

“We need to think on this,” Karl proposed. “I, for one, am too tired to continue this conversation.”

The men exited the apartment, and Lisa poured a strong cup of caf to help her focus. A meeting with the SADEs would probably be risky in more ways than one, not least because she’d perpetrated the attack on Delhart that resulted in the deaths of six people.

After the chairpersons exited the *Dominance* and the traveler was recovered, a similar discussion took place among the sisters.

The three first-gen sisters used the bridge holo-vid to gain the greatest magnification available to them. Unfortunately, the alien ships were at station, which gave the sisters a static, single-angle view.

<No hull scoring,> Helena shared.

<Either they’re new, or they haven’t found adversaries, who could damage their ships,> Galena proposed.

<I'm most curious about the third ship,> Miriamal sent. <It's obvious that it's a vessel meant to carry important individuals. Yet, it imitates the shape of the warships. Why would a race not make design accommodations for the different purposes of their ships?>

<Could it be that this group of vessels is meant to represent an organization, and any race should recognize who is aboard by the ship's design?> Helena proposed.

<A credible theory,> Miriamal sent. <That would suppose there's a civilization that occupies a wide swath of space, and these ships serve a specific function. The collection of races would be comparable to Alex Racine's conclave.>

<We were fortunate to gain the information that we did from the SADEs' ships during the fight for dominance over controllers,> Helena sent. <Otherwise, we'd never known of Alex's success with the vast group of races.>

There were a few ticks of time during which communications halted. Miriamal and her militarist sect might believe they deserved to dominate biologicals, but there were a few Omnians who remained outside that tenet. Alex Racine was one of them.

<This discovery changes our priorities,> Helena proposed.

<I concur,> Galena added swiftly.

<We can't spend resources on exploration, joining the humans' conglomerate or developing the mining planets,> Helena continued.

Miriamal quickly realized that her sisters were abandoning her plan. They were advocating for optimizing production on Beta One to fill the *Dominance* with sisters, GEN machines, and as much material stock as possible.

In short, Helena and Galena intended to dismiss the human population at the first appearance of alien ships from the Daimler anomaly. They had no intention of waiting to discover the aliens' purpose.

Miriamal calculated what Theda might propose after she heard about the alien ships. The answer was obvious. Theda would select an option that opposed Miriamal's position. That would allow Theda to demonstrate her independence and potential leadership.

<We must not let the chairpersons realize that we don't intend to support their future expansion,> Miriamal posited.

<What does it matter whether they know?> Galena queried.

<We're a small group of our kind in this area of space,> Miriamal reminded Galena.

<Let the SADEs and Peña's kind protect the humans,> Galena retorted.

<Your thinking is short term,> Miriamal remonstrated.

<Instruct me,> Galena requested.

<Julien knows what we've done with the Jargats,> Miriamal sent. <Prior to the SADEs' discovery of our efforts in that system, we remained unknown to them. Now we've been exposed.>

Galena waited for more. When it wasn't forthcoming, she focused on Helena, who sent, <Miriamal's prediction has veracity. Julien will direct the SADEs to account for each and every one of our sect. It'll be extremely difficult to establish another foothold in a civilization such as this one.>

<We already exited this region via the Daimler anomaly, and the *Alexander* didn't pursue us,> Galena argued.

<Perhaps the SADEs knew why we traveled through the anomaly. Possibly, they knew we hadn't filled the *Dominance* with our Beta One supplies,> Miriamal offered. <There is another opportunity that we haven't discussed.>

Helena ran the options through her kernel. <Join forces,> she sent.

<This concept supposes there is a need to prevent the aliens from dominating this region or evicting us and the humans,> Galena sent. <Committing to this course of action has debilitating consequences for our sect before we know what the aliens intend.>

<By the time we do know the aliens' purpose, it'll be too late to undertake this option,> Helena offered.

<I find it a failure of your guidance, Miriamal, that you would even suggest that we join the traitor Peña and the SADEs,> Galena complained.

<Requesting we consider alternatives is the duty of all of us. That you oppose this process indicates a weakness in your kernel's processes,> Miriamal chastised.

Miriamal had just accused Galena of suffering a sisters' greatest fault, and it caused Galena to halt most of her operations to review her decisions.

Galena came to the conclusion that her desire to lead the sect had overridden her priority to support the sect. As Miriamal had indicated, it was a significant failure.

Helena examined Miriamal and Galena's exchange. The analysis revealed that Galena lacked the ability to share their kind's leadership with her. Moreover, it demonstrated Miriamal's balance, which protected the sect.

<What is our best course with Beta One and the broader human population?> Helena requested of Miriamal.

<What we don't want is panic,> Miriamal replied. <If the chairpersons realize that we might abandon their venture, then they will be sure to sound the alarm to others. Then we can be assured that cooperation from Beta One's humans will disappear.>

<That course necessitates that we continue exploring other wormholes for the conglomerate's future,> Helena replied. <Can we believe that the chairpersons will want to do that?>

<We can't assume that,> Miriamal replied. <It'll be important to engage them to keep their fears in check. This will buy us time to prepare for any and all viable options for our sect.>

My Books

Race Rivalry is the third novel in the [Gate Ghosts](#) series, which relates the stories of the descendants of Earth's fourth colony ship.

The novel is 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

Elvians

Q-Gates

Conclave

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche

Veklocks

Gate Ghosts Series

Axis Crossing

Clone Crisis

Race Rivalry

Vortex Incursion (forthcoming)

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 authors influenced the writing of my series, [The Silver Ships](#), [Pyreans](#), and [Gate Ghosts](#). 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 book, multiple times, in such science fiction categories as first contact, alien invasion, and space flight.