

SOJOURN
A Silver Ships Novel

S. H. JUCHA



Excerpt: Chapters 1 & 2

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

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

Glossary

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Author's Note

My first novels created the Silver Ships series, which detail the stories of humans and their allies a millennium in the future. Later, I added the Pyreans series, relating the history of another group of humans.

Each of three worlds — New Terra, Méridien, and Pyre — were established by colonists who launched aboard massive exploration ships from Earth within the same century. While these two series are set in the same universe, the timelines of the Silver Ships and the Pyreans are separated by about four hundred years.

I recommend to individuals who enjoy the Silver Ships series but have not yet read or listened to the Pyreans series that they should take the opportunity to partake of the Pyreans series after this novel. You'll discover this series is similar to the Silver Ships books. They possess strong characters who challenge the status quo, despite the obstacles they face, and they create profound and lasting changes in their worlds.

The four-book, well-reviewed, Pyreans series includes *Empaths*, *Messinants*, *Jatouche*, and *Veklocks*, which follows the release of the Silver Ships' *Sojourn*. However, the story of the Pyreans doesn't end with *Veklocks*. The two series will merge and reveal a future that includes descendants of Pyrean characters, who readers and listeners enjoy, and our adventuresome present-day Omnians.

In the Silver Ships novel, *Alliance*, which follows *Sojourn*, ex-Earther Olawale Wombo and a small band of Omnians have supported the technological uplift of the inhabitants of Sol, the Earth's star. There exists a strong desire among Earthers to know the fates of their colony ships, which launched to claim new worlds. The Omnians and Earthers set sail to explore the fate of one of these colony ships, the *Honora Belle*, the transport of the Pyreans.

I want to thank my readers and listeners for your ongoing interest in the novels I write. I hope to continue to entertain you with exciting and thought-provoking stories of the possibilities that, one day, our galaxy might hold for humankind.

S. H. Jucha
March 2019

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Water World

“Permission granted,” Captain Asu Azasdau of the *Sojourn* replied to Ginny, the remote telemetry officer.

In turn, Ginny signaled the RT drone tech, Ian Moody, who actuated the probe’s preprogrammed pass of the planet it orbited.

The probe activated small engines to change its orbit. It closed on the planet, skipping through the planet’s gravity well and skimming through thick atmosphere on a tangent to the surface. At its closest point to the surface, the probe opened its doors and released a set of drones before streaking away from the planet’s pull.

The drones fell through the atmosphere, and the *Sojourn’s* bridge audience waited patiently for the devices to deploy. They’d collect a significant amount of telemetry that they would burst relay to the probe and then to the explorer ship.

The Haraken explorer ship, *Sojourn*, had investigated many planets since its nascent voyage to Celus-5, but the success of that mission had never been duplicated. Far and wide, most planets in optimum orbital positions lacked a single valuable resource — liquid water. The planet surfaces, they found, were covered in layers of frozen gases, which camouflaged bodies that couldn’t be colonized without extensive terraforming. Two potential colonies possessed the right climatic conditions, but biologically, they were inhospitable to humans.

There was one hard-earned lesson taken away from the Celus-5 mission. Subsequent explorations saw the explorer ship accompanied by a sting ship, Haraken’s first interstellar warship. Later, when Omnia Ships, Alex Racine’s company, shared its incredible technology with other human worlds, a Trident warship took over the protection detail.

Below decks, Teague Racine, the surface expedition leader or SEL officer, headed toward the RT workrooms to prepare for deployment. This would only happen when Captain Azasdau and Willem, a SADE and expeditionary co-leader, approved.

It pained Teague to walk through RT's central doors. This area had once housed the Swei Swee, who had been invaluable in the exploration of Celus-5. Unfortunately, there had been no opportunity for the six-legged, whistling sentients in subsequent investigations.

When the *Sojourn* completed its fifth planetary exploration, the Swei Swee chose to remain on Haraken. It was a sad parting for Teague, who had grown up playing with the hive that built its homes in the cliffs at the edge of his parents' land.

In contrast, the four Swei Swee — Whistles Keenly, Swift Claws, Bobs a Lot, and Sand Flipper — reveled in the enthusiastic celebrations the hive heaped on them. They were celebrated as returning heroes. The four of them were the first of their kind to journey to the stars in the company of humans as fully fledged crew members. Unattached females competed for their attentions. Soon the young heroes were mated, and the females were producing eggs that hatched into younglings.

There was one other extraordinary opportunity the adventurous young males brought to the hive. They were the first Swei Swee to prove that their kind could communicate directly with humans and SADEs via implants. It opened the way for others to adopt the technology.

Older Swei Swee eschewed the offer, but the young were eager to inform Mutter, a SADE and hive singer, that they wished to receive the implants and the training. Once the tech was completely adopted, they would be capable of joining human societies via the free education offered to them.

There were two deep emotional threads that wove through Teague's heart during the years of exploration. One was pain, the loss of the Swei Swee, which was receding; and other was joy, which was in ascendance, and was due to Ginny.

Ginny had been a young deaf orphan on Sol's Idona Station when Harakens found her. Julien and Cordelia objected to the thought of Ginny

being sent to a government child care center, known to possess an unsavory reputation. Instead, the SADEs adopted Ginny and several other orphans. It was the first time that sentient digital entities had adopted human children.

A medical operation restored Ginny's hearing, and she was discovered to have perfect pitch. In time, she became a hive singer to the Swei Swee.

From the time Ginny set foot on Haraken, one person captured her attention — the fearless young boy who swam with the aliens. Her desire to know him never wavered over the years, but it took Teague a long time to recognize the true value of the young woman he eventually called his friend.

Teague was a child of the ocean, who was raised in close proximity to the Swei Swee. He preferred the company of the Swei Swee to humans, and the time spent with them was a relief from the presence of those who surrounded his father. Teague chafed when he stood in the deep, dark shadow cast by his father. Over time, he came to realize that the resentment he felt was purely due to his thinking, and it was Ginny who helped him reach that place.

One evening, walking along the cliffs in the light of Haraken's moons, Ginny had slipped her hand into Teague's. She'd done this often, especially when Teague's infamous temper fought to be free of his control.

This particular evening, Teague was aware of how much he depended on Ginny's presence and not just when he was angry or depressed but on all occasions. He'd turned to her, staring at her face in the dim glow from the whitecaps of the waves lit by the moons.

While Teague searched for the words to express what he felt, Ginny, as usual, took the matter of their hearts into her own hands. She was of average height, but Teague was taller than his formidable father. It required her to jump to wrap her arms around Teague's neck. With her nose centimeters from Teague's, she asked, "What did you want to say?"

Teague grinned at Ginny's uncanny way of bypassing his awkward moments, and he kissed her soundly. Thereafter, they'd become inseparable partners.

Now Teague and Ginny worked with scientists and techs, who explored the various planets' surfaces. A ping in Teague's implant told him the explorer ship's controller had received the first data upload from the drones.

Rosette, a SADE and close companion of Captain Azas dau, chose a typical stream of the drones to display on the bridge holo-vid.

"Imagine that," Asu commented quietly, while staring at the holo-vid imagery. "We search for planets with a modicum of liquid water without success. When we do find water, it covers the entire planet."

"The drones have covered only a portion of the planet, Captain," Rosette replied. "Don't lose heart. We may yet find a habitable continent."

While Rosette was comforting her captain, Willem and she were simultaneously analyzing the tiny islands that dotted the waterscape.

<Unnatural,> Willem sent privately to Rosette via their internal comms.

<More than a ninety-eight percent match in the comparisons of the islands' outlines,> Rosette returned.

<Constructs formed by some biological species, sentient or not,> Willem concluded.

"Ginny, please investigate these three islands," Willem requested, highlighting them on the holo-vid.

"Ian, reroute drones four, eight, and ten to the closest targets," Ginny relayed.

"Too similar for comfort?" Asu queried Willem.

"Precisely, Captain," Willem replied.

"The atmosphere has an acceptable mix of gases for humans," Ian reported. "However, the temperature and humidity at the surface level would make living slightly uncomfortable, as in it's hot and sticky."

"No place is perfect," Ginny muttered.

"The drones are over the islands," Ian reported.

"Add spectrographic readings to the visuals, Ian, and scan the waters immediately surrounding the land masses," Ginny ordered.

"It'll reduce their flight times," Ian pointed out. "The additional activity will drain the power crystals faster."

“A regrettable necessity,” Ginny replied. “There is the distinct possibility that there are biologicals that swim in these waters and enter these constructs from underneath.”

“They could be sentient, and they could be dangerous,” Asu added.

The bridge audience assumed their regular duties, while they maintained links with the controller, anxious to view the next series of uploads.

“The data’s in,” Ian announced unnecessarily, when the drone uploads reached the controller. Rosette had already chosen a drone’s telemetry to feed to the holo-vid.

Willem manipulated the display. Taken from multiple angles, the telemetry allowed a 3-D visual of the small island, and he was examining the subtle undulations in the land.

“Fascinating,” Willem said. “Is it the same for the other two?” he asked Rosette.

“Yes,” Rosette replied.

Asu raised an eyebrow at Rosette, requesting more details.

“There is a similar and distinct pattern repeated in each construct, Captain,” Rosette explained. “Although the atypical grasses and small shrubs attempt to disguise it, there are hexagonal formations interspersed with pentagonal ones.”

“The hexagonal shapes are twelve to fifteen meters across, and the pentagonal ones are slightly smaller,” Willem noted. “The fittings aren’t perfect, but the vegetation, primarily in the form of vines, has bridged the gaps.”

“Let’s review any fauna data,” Asu requested.

Immediately, Rosette accessed one of the drone’s spectrograph streams for the holo-vid.

“There’s slight movement among the vegetation, Captain,” Rosette said, “although the temperature variation with the surface is minimal. This suggests forms of insectoids.”

“How about in the nearby waters?” Asu asked.

Willem and Rosette annotated the display by encircling a variety of shapes in the water and on the periphery of the island. The same hexagonal

and pentagonal shapes were evident, and those in the water evinced elevated temperatures above that of their surroundings.

“We might be observing either two species or two sexes of the same species,” Willem said.

“What’s the possibility that these one or two species are sentient?” Asu inquired.

“Minimal,” Willem offered. “Their greatest limitation is their lack of means to manipulate material. They’ve only flat fins.”

“Unless they could move matter with their minds,” Ginny suggested. Her comment might have been facetious, but she wore a serious expression. Based on the incredible discoveries made by Alex Racine throughout his lifetime, there was every possibility that Ginny’s suggestion was a distinct possibility.

“Thoughts, Willem?” Asu asked.

“The planet deserves investigating,” Willem replied. “We should target one of these structures, land, and explore the manner in which they’re constructed.”

“That would allow us to recover the drones and charge them,” Ginny added.

“And give us the opportunity to deploy the drones across more of the planet since our probe can’t penetrate the thick atmosphere,” Asu agreed. “There’s always the possibility of discovering a continent.”

Asu regarded Willem, who studied the holo-vid, while he streamed more telemetry data. Finally, a blue ring highlighted one of the islands.

<Captain Plummer,> Asu sent via his implant, <have you been following our speculations?>

<Affirmative, Captain,> Adrianna replied. She was aboard the Trident *Guardian*. <Our holo-vid has mirrored yours, and we’ve been linked to your controller for comm and implant relay.>

<We’re choosing to take up station over the water planet, drop a team, and investigate the structure that Willem has highlighted on the holo-vid.>

Asu waited while Adrianna accessed the latest system telemetry. Although Willem and he were the expeditionary leaders, the Haraken

president, Terese Lechaux, had made it clear that Captain Plummer had security authority for any surface explorations.

<The system is clear, Captain Azasdau,> Adrianna sent. <I'm approving your approach to the planet and the drop of one traveler.>

<Acknowledged,> Asu sent. He glanced at Rosette, who nodded, and programmed the ship's controller for the approach.

In turn, Willem signaled Teague that their landing of a single team was approved.

Many of the exploration members, who had investigated Celus-5, were still with the team. There had been promotions. The then junior members had become the seniors — scientists, techs, and security. Critically, there had been losses on the first planet. Edward Sardi, an Earther physicist, and Ullie Tallen, a Méridien scientist, had succumbed to the extended siege of their trapped traveler by the natives, the Dischnya.

By now, the procedures for a landing were well-organized, and the team completed their preparations a full day before the *Sojourn* made orbit over the water planet.

* * *

Late in the evening before deployment, Teague and Ginny had the RT prep area to themselves. As usual, Teague couldn't sleep the night before the drop, and as was his habit, he repeatedly reviewed the team's readiness.

Ginny had her own way of dealing with Teague's angst. She would let him work through the entire list once, which usually took Teague about two hours. When he started on a second walk-through, she would gently ease into his space. At first, it would be a touch of his hand, as she handed off a piece of equipment. Then it might be a gentle bump of a shoulder or a hip.

At some point, Teague would suddenly find Ginny in his path. Her eyes would soften, as she stared at him. The need to recheck the preparations would fade, as Teague focused on Ginny's face. Usually, Teague would grin or laugh. It was a game they played, and he had no

problem with it. Ginny was a much better distraction from the worry about the coming event than checking the landing preparations five or six times.

Later, in the early morning hours, the two lay side by side, exhausted. They chatted for a while and then drifted off to sleep. Their implant chronometers woke them after only five hours of sleep, but it was better than what Teague would have achieved without Ginny's guile.

After a shared refresher and a quick donning of uniforms, Teague and Ginny were on their way to morning meal. Both of them queried the controller for the ship's position. The *Sojourn* held station above the planet, and the *Guardian*, the Trident warship, was two hundred and fifty kilometers outward from them.

The couple joined Asu, Willem, and Rosette at the head table. Asu and Willem were discussing priorities.

"I agree that determining the sentience of the creatures at the rims of these islands is important," Willem said, "but we must recognize that they might not be the ones to have built these structures."

"You're still convinced that these islands are artificial?" Asu queried.

"Based on their geometric shapes and repeated design, Captain, they could be nothing else," Rosette replied.

"Could natives have built these islands as giant rafts to escape the flooding of their lands and then died off?" Ginny asked, as she accepted a plate from a server.

"There are many possibilities," Willem allowed.

"However, that idea doesn't seem to fit," Teague said. He was careful to respectfully disagree with Ginny. "It's the absence of other significant land masses. That indicates to me that any native sentients weren't land dwellers."

"I must admit that was my first idea too," Asu interjected. "However, the number of these structures seems to be an important clue. They've been around long enough to accumulate vegetation, which requires the collection of airborne dust. I'd think that if they were rafts, then they should have sunk during that length of time, either by storms or natural erosion."

“Suppose we find no sentients and the waters are tolerable?” Rosette asked.

“Then we should proceed to investigate the planet for long-term considerations, weather patterns, ocean depths, natural resources, and other parameters,” Asu replied.

“We could establish floating domes or ones grounded on the ocean floor,” Teague suggested.

“Floating landing pads could handle the travelers,” Ginny added.

The conversation died, as humans consumed their meals, and the SADEs left them to dine in peace.

The thought crossed Teague’s mind that while the Swei Swee might enjoy the waters on this planet, they’d found no place for them to construct their houses. The Swei Swee built their exquisitely colored houses on the cliffsides.

Planetfall

The landing party's traveler was a specialized cargo model. It was crammed full of exploration gear, racks of instrumentation, and bins full of sampling and testing devices. There were just enough seats in the forward portion of the main cabin to accommodate the crew.

Orly Saadner was the pilot. He'd been a pilot during the exploration of Celus-5. Several promotions had been offered to him over the years, and he refused all of them to remain on the team. In Orly's words, "You haven't lived until you've set foot on a strange new world."

When everyone was aboard, Willem signaled the rear hatch closed.

The action cued Orly that he was cleared to launch. He ensured the bay was empty and depressurized before he triggered the exit doors open. Then he eased the traveler out of the bay and dropped quickly toward the planet. He was guided to the target island by Willem's coordinates.

When Orly reached the planet's surface, he followed Willem's instructions to hover a few meters above the island.

Willem had chosen an average structure after comparing it to the others. It measured about one hundred sixty meters across, and it possessed the characteristic geometric shape.

The scientists collected air samples and confirmed the drones' data. The atmosphere was satisfactory. Nonetheless, Willem specified environment suits at all times.

The team spent an hour observing the island and its surrounding waters. Curiosity was high, but more than anything, they searched for danger. It had found them on more than one planet.

When Willem was satisfied that conditions appeared benign, he linked to the pilot, sending, <Orly, set us down in the middle of the island. Don't use the landing gear. I want this ship's weight spread out. Be careful to

settle the shuttle slowly and gradually increase our weight in case this structure can't support us.>

<Understood, Willem,> Orly replied via the implant in his brain, which transmitted his thoughts.

Willem and Orly monitored the ship's sensors, as the traveler touched the scrubgrasses and vines. Finally, the shell settled onto a firm surface, and its descent was halted.

<Stand by, Orly,> Willem sent. <We wait.>

A half hour later, Willem signaled Orly and the team that he gave his approval to begin exploration.

Lieutenant Bethany Latimer and Sergeant Smitty Lange, the security team, checked to ensure every member was sealed in an environment suit before Bethany dropped the wide, rear hatch. Then they preceded the explorers out of the traveler. Immediately, they circled the ship, looking through the vegetation for anything that could harm the crew.

<Insect life only,> Bethany sent in the open, <and all of it flees at our approach. Nothing appears aggressive.>

A few team members accompanied Willem, Teague, and Ginny to the edge of the island. They could hear the splashing of creatures that leapt into the water for safety.

A critical exploration step was to determine the composition of the ocean waters. A tech knelt at the edge, but Willem stayed his hand until he had time to examine the movement beneath the surface. He could see the small marine life that stayed close to the surface and the structure. The largest of these were four-finned, shelled creatures ranging from a half meter across to several meters. Detecting no danger, Willem allowed the tech to proceed with his tests.

"A little greater salinity than the oceans of Libre, Haraken, or Omnia," the tech reported, examining the output of his device.

"It could be due to the evaporation of the ocean's waters over the millennia, increasing the salinity," Teague suggested.

"Good news. The salts and minerals aren't harmful to humans," a scientist interjected.

As soon as the water tests were performed, the scientists and techs hurried to join the investigation taking place at the ship.

“Get that look off your face,” Ginny demanded sternly of Teague.

“What?” Teague asked innocently, shifting his gaze from Ginny to Willem.

“Don’t play dumb with me, Teague Racine,” Ginny retorted hotly. “When you heard the waters were safe, you thought about jumping in. I see that wistful expression on your face.”

Teague worked to school his countenance, and he briefly glanced toward Willem.

<It wouldn’t be prudent to deny Ginny’s challenge, Teague,> Willem sent privately. <You’ll only further anger your partner.>

Teague gave Ginny a weak grin and held up his hands in surrender.

“That’s better,” Ginny allowed, giving Teague a playful punch on the shoulder.

<Willem,> Ian sent, <I’ve recovered the drones and exchanged their power cells. They’re ready for programming.>

<I’ll be with you shortly, Ian,> Willem replied. He left Teague and Ginny to monitor the sea life, while he returned to the ship. The brief exchange between the couple gave him confidence that Ginny would keep her partner out of trouble.

Willem was partway to the ship when the sensors in his feet registered a short burst of microtremors. They were too brief to determine their direction, much less the source of the vibrations. After a moment’s hesitation, he resumed his return to the traveler.

At the ship, the scientists and techs were well into their exploration of the island. Benches were set up to hold their devices and the collected samples. They were testing bits of vegetation, the rudimentary soil, and some captured insects.

Using imagery from the probe, Willem worked with Ian to program the drones’ investigation of other sections of the planet. It would be necessary for Orly to deliver the drones via the traveler to the next region. For now, he set about packing the drones into their prepared shelves aboard the ship.

Stepping off the ramp and heading to join Teague and Ginny, Willem felt a second set of microtremors. They were stronger than the first, but he still couldn't ascertain their source. He located Bethany's implant. She was near the traveler's bow, and he sought her out.

"Problems?" asked Bethany, when she saw Willem's determined approach.

"I'm not sure," Willem replied. "Twice I've felt tremors, but I don't know the cause."

"Could this structure be breaking up?" Bethany asked.

"Unknown," Willem replied, "but I want Smitty and you to ensure that the team doesn't stray too far."

"Understood," Bethany said, nodding. "We might need to make a fast exit." She ran a sweep for implants. Only two weren't in the immediate vicinity — Teague and Ginny.

* * *

At the structure's edge, Teague unpacked an aqua-drone. Ian had built a set of them years ago, but this was Teague's first opportunity to put one into action.

The aqua-drone was designed to be deployed in close proximity to the operator. It could be controlled by comm or implant, whichever was within range. An electrified wire cage surrounded the twenty-five-centimeter-diameter device. Multiple propellers allowed it to be highly maneuverable, and it could stream images from its vid pickup.

Ginny couldn't help but laugh. Teague's exuberance at the anticipation of his toy's launch was evident.

Teague eased the aqua-drone into the water, and the couple linked their implants to receive the transmissions. The water was crystal clear, unspoiled by technological development.

Marine fauna gathered around the drone. A few nuzzled it with mouths or beaks and were quickly discouraged by the mild shocks they received

from the cage. Unfortunately, the number of touches worked to drain the small device's power crystal.

"Teague, look at the shapes of the four-finned creatures," Ginny said.

Teague guided the aqua-drone around two of the shelled, marine animals that exhibited the paired flippers.

"Odd, isn't it?" Teague commented. "Their hexagonal and pentagonal shapes echo the structure's geometric outline. I wonder if the natives revered them. Maybe this fauna was their primary resource ... the meat for food and the shells to make bowls, utensils, decorative items, and anything else they could dream up."

Ginny withheld her comment. Something nagged at her mind, but she couldn't pin it down.

Teague signaled the aqua-drone to dive. He was interested in discovering whether the island was an outcrop of the ocean's bottom. To the couple's surprise, the drone wasn't much more than five meters deep, when the vid stream displayed the structure's bottom. Teague swiveled the drone for a better view of the lower layer, when something ghosted past the vid pickup.

"Was that a creature or an anomaly created by layers of the water's salinity?" Ginny asked.

"The view is clear now," Teague said, "but that was strange. If that was a marine animal, it was nearly transparent, and it was big." It chilled him to think that he'd considered taking a dip in unexplored waters, and he thanked his good fortune for having a level-headed partner.

Teague sent the drone under the structure. When its signal started to fade, he turned it around and guided it toward him.

<Willem, this isn't an island,> Teague sent. <It's a free-floating raft.>

<Depth?> Willem queried.

<Five to six meters,> Teague replied.

<Tresses, buttresses, or any form of substructure support?> Willem continued.

<Nothing,> Teague sent.

<Willem,> Ginny interjected, <the bottom of the structure mirrors the top. It has the same geometric pattern.>

Willem was considering the new observations, when he felt the tremors again. This time it was while he was on the far side of the traveler from the first two incidents. It enabled him to pinpoint the source. It was immediately under the traveler.

In the ticks of time it took Willem to analyze the team's implant locations, he realized they were in the worst possible locations. If everyone was outside the traveler, he would have warned them away from the ship. Instead, most of the scientists and techs were aboard, running their tests, while Teague, Ginny, Orly, and security were outside.

Feeling the structure cracking under his feet, Willem's choices were narrowed to one. <Board,> he sent in the open, with urgency.

It was a race. The structure slowly disintegrated under the traveler's weight, and the nearby team hurried to board.

Smitty Lange, the security sergeant, knocked the samples from a tech's hands and shoved him toward the shuttle. The young man foolishly attempted to secure the material before boarding. Another tech, Yoyo, tripped and sprawled into the grass, and Smitty hauled her up and ran with her toward the ramp.

Willem detected the traveler's motion, as he sprinted along its length toward the aft end. He located Bethany and Orly running along the other side.

Unfortunately, the traveler's accelerated positional shift, which was downward, indicated there were only seconds to spare. Willem was forced to signal the ramp's closure. It was a dangerous call, but he felt it necessary to protect the scientists and techs who were already aboard.

Willem rounded the ship's aft end at the same time as Orly. The shuttle was falling through the surface, and the ramp was only halfway closed. Orly hesitated, when he saw the ramp in an up position, and Willem grabbed him and neatly tossed him through the opening, as the ship fell past him.

When the surface under and around the ship gave way, Willem and Bethany fell through the gaping hole. Willem followed the traveler, which crashed through the bottom of the structure. He registered surprise that the

raft was hollow. Better said, it was a honeycomb, and the ship had rested on a single giant cell.

The traveler sank into the ocean, taking on seawater, while the ramp finished closing. The ship was slightly buoyant, which slowed its descent.

With the shuttle's smooth shell, there wasn't an opportunity for Willem to latch on to it. His heavy, negatively buoyant avatar struck the side of the traveler, and Willem descended to the sea bottom.

Teague parked the aqua-drone when he heard Willem's warning. Ginny hesitated, and Teague wrapped an arm around her waist and hugged her to him, as he pumped his long legs to gain the ship. The couple arrived in time to see the traveler sink out of sight, and Willem and Bethany disappear after it.

Near the crater, Teague slowed, set Ginny down, and urged her to stay back. He located Bethany's implant, which was a few meters from him. Edging close to the opening, he saw a pair of powerful New Terran hands struggling to hold on to the edge of the upper surface.

<Stay back,> Bethany ordered Teague, when she identified his implant creeping close to her. <It's too dangerous.>

Teague, of course, did the only thing that his conscience would allow him to do. He ignored her. Crawling on his belly, he reached over the edge and grasped one of Bethany's wrists with both hands. Teague had inherited his father's stature, but he lacked his father's massive musculature, and Bethany wasn't an insignificant heavy worlder.

Bethany's grip began to tire, despite Teague's efforts to pull her up. Suddenly, Ginny hands were clamped around Bethany's other wrist.

<You idiots,> Bethany sent. There was an element of anger mixed with hope in her thought.

<Yell at us after we get you up here,> Ginny sent back, gritting her teeth and pulling with all her strength.

Among the three of them, they managed to secure one of Bethany's elbows on the surface. Teague and Ginny kept grabbing deeper on Bethany's arms until they could grasp her security harness and pull her to safety.

“Get back from the edge,” Bethany urged, pushing Teague and Ginny away.

Teague retreated, pulling Ginny with him, and Bethany crawled after them.

“You two don’t follow orders any better than certain of your seniors,” Bethany commented, breathing hard.

Ginny grinned at Bethany, and said, “I don’t know about Teague, but I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Bethany grudgingly returned the grin. She clamped her hands on the couple’s shoulders, and said, “Thank you. I don’t swim too well. In fact, I’m better at sinking.”

Immediately, Bethany linked with Teague and Ginny and then connected with the traveler’s controller for a head count. While Bethany did that, Teague reached out for Willem.

<Everyone is aboard the shuttle except for the three of us and Willem,> Bethany sent.

<Willem is on the sea floor,> Teague reported. <He’s about thirty meters down. Problem is that his ability to swim is worse than yours, Bethany.>

<Why aren’t we seeing the traveler returning to the surface?> Ginny asked. <Surely, it can do that.>

My Books

Sojourn, the thirteenth novel in the Silver Ships series, is available in e-book, softcover, and audiobook versions. Please visit my website, <http://scottjucha.com>, for publication dates and locations. You may register at my website to receive e-mail updates on the publication of my upcoming novels.

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche

Veklocks (forthcoming)

The Silver Ships Series

The Silver Ships

Libre

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Haraken

Sol

Espero

Allora

Celus-5

Omnia

Vinium

Nua'll

Artifice

Sojourn

Alliance (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 masters influenced the writing of my first two series, [The Silver Ships](#) and [Pyreans](#). I crafted my stories to give readers intimate views of my characters, who wrestle with the challenges of living in space and inhabiting alien worlds.

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

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

Readers have been generous with their comments, which they've left on Amazon and Goodreads for others to review. I truly enjoy what I do, and I'm pleased to read how my stories have positively affected many readers' lives.

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

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