

ELVIANS
A Silver Ships Novel

S. H. JUCHA



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

Glossary

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1: Stealthy Survey

<Our location represents the farthest extent of the excavator positions,> Genoa sent. She was the lead SADE of an Omnian scout ship, which surveyed the Olassa system's far belt.

For the scouts, this was a return to the system of the flora symbionts, the Olassa. During the first visit, Killian, Bethley, and Trium aboard the scout ship *Vivian's Mirror* were interdicted by Olassa warships, which necessitated an intervention by Alex's fleet. The SADEs had named the system Vinium before they understood the local race's term for themselves.

<We're marking the extent of the mining sites in the other direction,> Beryl added, who was the lead in a second scout.

Then Linn, a third lead SADE reported, <We've examined the moons of the nearby outermost ice planet. No mining operations are detected inward.>

<The invaders' efforts to collect resources cover a one-degree swath of the outer rim,> Julien shared with his audience aboard the city-ship *Freedom*.

<Genoa, Beryl, any evidence of Olassa ships near the mining sites?> Alex Racine, the Omnian fleet's co-leader asked.

The SADEs' pauses were atypical, and it didn't bode well for the news. <With regret, Alex,> Beryl sent. <We've identified debris around the mining asteroids. The duplication of similar pieces indicates the Olassa employed their warships to disrupt the invaders' activities.>

<Are Olassa ships present in the rim now?> Cordelia asked. She was the captain of the city-ship and a rear admiral, who held responsibility for fighting the *Freedom* and protecting the freighter fleet that accompanied the warships.

<Negative,> Beryl and Genoa responded.

<Any damage to the mining operations?> Fleet Admiral Tatia Tachenko inquired.

<We've observed none,> Genoa sent.

<We concur,> Beryl added. <The vehicles involved in the mining and processing of ores and frozen gases are unfamiliar to us. However, it's our consensus that the machines wouldn't be the sources of the weaponry that destroyed the Olassa ships.>

<These entities aren't just miners. They're murderous invaders ... no better than the Colony,> Renée de Guirnon, the fleet's co-leader, sent vehemently. The peaceful Olassa held a special place in her heart.

<Renée,> Alex sent gently and privately to his partner.

Renée blew out a harsh breath. <Understood,> she replied. This wasn't the time to inject her anger into the discussion.

Cordelia supplied images to the city-ship's holo-vid. The scouts had captured telemetry of the vehicles involved in the mining and processing operations.

<Ingenious,> Z commented. He was a SADE and Renée's protector. <There appears to be common components in the vehicles' structures.>

Cordelia, who was the fleet's premier imagery artist, used Z's observation to break up the gigantic machines that crawled across the asteroids' surfaces.

<How intuitive of you, dear one,> Miranda purred. She was Z's partner, and she, like the others, had watched Cordelia dissociate the machines and find multiple common elements.

<Vehicles designed around core components that are capable of being swapped out,> Franz Cohen, the fleet's fighter rear admiral, commented. <Mickey Brandon is missing out.>

<At the rate we keep discovering new engineering techniques within this galaxy, Mickey will have enough projects to last a SADE's lifetime,> Alex commented. <However, right now, I need Mickey and his engineering teams to solve the mystery of the alliance's Q-gates.>

<Beryl, hold your present position,> Julien sent. Then he connected to Beryl's controller and directed the telemetry input. <Alex, observe,> he sent.

The holo-vid displayed the passing marks of a monstrous machine. Julien adjusted the input, and the tracks led to an intricate structure, which had been scooping frozen gases, processing them, and offloading compressed blocks of purified material. However, it was no longer moving.

<A certain level of sophistication is driving the machines,> Z commented. <The tracks aren't laid in a mechanical pattern. The machines are sensing the uptake of compounds and navigating toward richer deposits.>

<That means there's a supply list,> Vice Admiral Reiko Shimada suggested. <Entities have to be directing the machines to produce the required quantities of material needed to maintain the invading ship.>

<Or one entity,> Cordelia interjected.

Thoughts of Artifice shot through the minds of those on the bridge.

<If true, what is the relationship between the entity and the biologicals aboard?> Julien asked.

The bridge audience watched a new conveyance unit roll out from a pile of spares. Using a combination of wheels and treads, the spare drove around to the front of the disabled machine. Then the upper section of the machine rolled forward to combine with the spare. Then it traveled onward, continuing to mine and process resources.

Another machine hurried to the disabled section and began diagnosing the problem by attaching sensor lines to connections available on the side of the unit.

<Efficient,> Z commented. <The design and repair techniques provide minimum downtime.>

<Any weaponry identified on this collection of machines?> Tatia asked, seeking confirmation of the SADEs' earlier assumption. <Negative,> was what she heard from Julien, who'd handled the SADEs' opinions.

Tatia found the lack of information frustrating. Something had destroyed Ollassa warships before any damage could be done to the mining sites.

<We have to be dealing with fighters,> Tatia surmised. <They've got to be swift and powerful if they can take out warships. Another thing, I find it odd that they don't provide cover for the machines by taking up stations

near the mining sites. That means they're kept aboard that huge ship until they're needed.>

Alex replaced the holo-vid imagery with that of the invaders' ship. Unlike the system probe, which hadn't been able to supply information on the monstrous ship's size, the scouts provided detailed telemetry.

Humans' implants absorbed what the SADEs already knew. The huge ship possessed a central element four times the diameter of the *Freedom*. In addition, while a city-ship was ovoid, the invaders' ship was a globe, of sorts. It wasn't a solid sphere. Rather, there was a solid mass that comprised the center. A long buttress extended from the globe to provide a mount for multiple engines. Then enormous loops sprouted from the top of the globe and met at its bottom. Along the loops' lengths, thin connectors linked the loops with the central mass. Tiny pinpoints of light shone along the loops, indicating residences.

<Every cabin owner deserves a wonderful view of space,> Renée commented sarcastically.

Alex began pacing, and the audience made room for him. <The mining and processing are extensive. As Renée intimated, the loops indicate residents who expect to be aboard ship for an extended length of time, if not forever.>

<A population that doesn't expect to find a home world or doesn't care to locate one,> Julien offered.

<And this race came prepared to defend their resource collection,> Tatia added. <They knew they would encounter sentient species who would fight to defend their systems.>

<They're individuals who are comfortable in their superiority,> Cordelia said. <If the fighters exist, they repelled the Ollassa and returned to the ship. That's an assumption on the invaders' part that any event can be handled.>

<A race like this wouldn't use pilots in the fighters,> Franz reasoned.

<Drones,> Reiko agreed. <They wouldn't risk their precious citizens.>

<Do we establish contact?> Julien asked.

<Inbound traffic,> Tatia warned, and she shifted the display.

Several small transports had exited the bottom of the invaders' ship and laid on courses for various excavation sites.

<This should be interesting,> Z commented in anticipation.

The audience waited and watched as the transports neared various areas of the belt.

Cordelia selected telemetry from Genoa's ship that gave humans a good view of an asteroid that had accumulated blocks of frozen gases. Each block was a one-meter cube.

A transport came to a halt overtop the stack of cubes at a distance of about one hundred meters.

A compact machine raced out from the reserves. At the site of the frozen blocks, it unfolded until it resembled a crane, with its length bent in two. Then it gripped the uppermost block, made a slight adjustment to its position, and extended the crane arm with a snap.

The block was launched at the transport's bottom. It sailed upward, crossing the hundred meters, and disappeared into the transport.

There were a few moments of the audience's stunned silence, while the crane machine neatly and accurately delivered every block to the transport. When the operation was complete, the crane returned to its compact shape and hurried back to the pile of reserve equipment. Then the transport sailed on to the next asteroid.

Alex had halted his pacing to stare at the holo-vid's display of the transport's collection of resources. A cold feeling swept up his spine. In his years, there hadn't been a contact like this. A technologically superior race was collecting resources from a foreign system, effectively repelling resistance, and going about its business. While the hubris was galling, the potential for a calamitous encounter was more than significant.

<The answer to your question, Julien, is no,> Alex sent quietly. <Before we contact that ship, we've work to do with the Ollassa. Genoa, Beryl, and Linn, proceed inward. Contact any outward bound Ollassa ships and indicate to them that they're to return to their World of Light.>

The slow response indicated to Alex that the phrase *indicate to them* was too vague for the SADEs. It was understandable, considering the Ollassa communicated via ultrasonic frequencies that emanated from their blooms.

Ship-to-ship communications for the Olassa involved comm systems that could pick up, transmit, and broadcast the waves from the blooms.

<Use your imaginations,> Alex sent, knowing that was another phrase that the SADEs would have to interpret.

The bridge audience could hear an imitation of a human snicker. Its pitch perfect tones indicated a SADE was the source, and the comm ID identified it as emanating from Killian, the lead SADE of the fourth scout.

<Not to worry, Dassata,> Killian sent. <I've the answer for us.>

<Now, that, dear Killian, is imagination,> Miranda enthused.

Killian had taken Julien's records from the *Freedom*. They were data files containing the SADEs' first-contact experiences with the Olassa. Julien had used a portable holo-vid to facilitate conversations. The holo-vid could emanate the ultrasonic frequencies that an Olassa's bloom could perceive. Miranda and Z had assisted in compiling the language translation.

Now, Killian proposed using that same database to originate messages to the Olassa ships. The SADEs would feed their communications to the sensors on the scouts' shells, which would broadcast in frequencies the Olassa could recognize.

Alex's deep chuckle resonated in the chests of the other humans, and Killian's emotional algorithms rose in hierarchy.

<Killian, your mission remains the same,> Alex sent. <Facilitate contact with whoever is in charge of the Olassa command center, if it remains Mesa Control. Your team will coordinate communications between the Olassa and us.>

<Understood, Dassata,> Killian sent. <Have holo-vids; will communicate.>

<Killian, we'll need a complete telemetry scan of Olassa ships and platforms surrounding the home worlds before you land,> Tatia sent.

<Understood, Admiral,> Killian replied.

<All scouts,> Cordelia sent. <The invaders' ship is stationed slightly above the ecliptic. Therefore, I want you to remain below the ecliptic, while you proceed inward.>

Cordelia received affirmatives. Then the scouts dropped off the conference call.

Alex frowned at Killian's odd quip, but he noticed Renée smiling to herself. It pleased him to see that Killian had managed to divert her anger.

<What did you understand about Killian's last remark that I didn't?> Alex sent privately.

Renée reached out and slid a hand into Alex's. It was an apology for her earlier outburst. Then she sent, <While Cordelia was at Sol and researching the final two Earther colony ships and their target worlds, she ran across a huge trove of Earther vids that were trapped on older data mediums. While she perused the recordings for data on the ships, she transferred numerous vids to our library. The scouts downloaded selections of the new material before they launched.>

Alex received a link. A quick perusal of the data file revealed a black-and-white vid of a man adorned in an ancient costume. He was dressed entirely in black, which included his wide-brimmed hat. A belt with a holster held a weapon. Alex stored the link to view the file later.

Turning to the intimate group, Cordelia shifted to voice and said, "I assume that the fleet holds its present station."

"Absolutely," Alex replied.

The manner in which Alex responded to Cordelia made the other humans nervous.

"What's wrong?" Renée asked gently. It was the question that everyone wanted to ask Alex.

"It's the combination of sophistication, obviously AI-origination, firepower, and indifference to confiscating systems' resources that makes this race extremely dangerous," Alex replied. "We've got to be careful in our approach to them. One misstep might result in a battle that sees our forces destroyed."

Franz let out a long, soft whistle. "We faced the huge swath of Artifice's drone fighters at the system near the wall, and they nearly overwhelmed us," he said. He had memories of his fighter's remains tethered and hauled aboard a Trident. He'd ordered the chief to be careful about recovering the sister, who had been Miriamelle, in his craft.

“I wonder how many fighters could reside aboard that ship,” Reiko mused.

It wasn't a question, but that didn't mean the SADEs didn't begin calculating the interior space of the ship's central volume in an effort to provide an answer.

“What's the plan?” Tatia asked.

That was the question that Alex knew was coming. He regarded Tatia and slowly shook his head. “Don't have an answer, at this moment,” he said. “My first concern is to ensure that the Ollassa don't send any more warships against this enemy. It's obvious that the home forces are outmatched. After that, we need to devise a means to learn about these adversaries without exposing our forces.”

“Every race has weaknesses,” Julien announced. “In time, they'll be revealed.”

“Of that, I've no doubt,” Alex replied. “We have to ask ourselves how much time we have before the race in that ship believes we're an impediment to their resource collection and chooses to do something about it.”

“Something to keep in mind, Alex,” Franz said, “is that the invaders' fighters crossed the dark to interdict the Ollassa ships, engaged in battle, and then returned across hundreds of thousands of kilometers of space. Our travelers can't engage those fighters unless we lure them system inward like we did Artifice's drones.”

“And if they're highly maneuverable drones, the Tridents will have trouble defeating them in a fight,” Reiko added.

The more the admirals discussed the challenges of dealing with sophisticated drone fighters, the more Alex believed the danger might become insurmountable. Unfortunately, there wasn't a second choice. He wouldn't sail the fleet for home, without doing all he could for the Ollassa. The thought crossed his mind that this might be how his life ended. He'd take on one enemy too many. It would be against an adversary that could easily destroy his fleet and sail on without a second thought.

Alex exited the bridge, leaving the admirals to their discussion.

Renée eyed Julien and tipped her head in Alex's direction. Then Julien and she followed Alex to the owner's suite.

Alex made thé for Renée and him to keep his hands busy, while his mind was occupied.

"We need to be careful with this race," Alex said, while he served the thé. "Small steps."

"The greatest unknown is the type of offensive vessel the invaders employ," Julien replied. "The admirals' analyses are logical, but we've had no proof of their existence. It would be practical to tempt one of their craft to launch."

Alex held the warm mug of thé in both hands, while he regarded Julien.

The SADE could tell that Alex wasn't focused on him. His friend was looking through him, while he visualized the contest.

"Would a drone traveler force the invaders to launch?" Renée inquired.

"Good question," Alex replied absent-mindedly, while he continued his musings.

<Is a drone traveler capable of eliciting the most data from the encounter with an invader's fighter?> Z asked, inserting himself into the conversation.

The corner of Alex's mouth quirked at Julien sharing their conversation with the SADEs.

<As opposed to what?> Renée sent.

<As opposed to an experienced veteran, Ser,> Z replied.

Renée's mouth formed a surprised oh. She hadn't considered putting a human in the cockpit. It seemed too great a risk.

<Our dear Franz would ensure the invader's drone displayed its full capabilities, while he played with it,> Miranda pointed out. <When the contest ends or becomes too dangerous, Franz could head system inward.>

<That would tell us whether the invaders were a revengeful lot, depending on whether they followed the pilot inward,> Alex sent.

<I suppose it's no use suggesting we should ask for volunteers,> Renée asked. <We'd have nearly every pilot sending in their request, and Franz would overrule them all.>

<Undoubtedly,> Alex replied. <Let me discuss the options with the admirals, and we'll see how we can best tease the invaders into playing one on one with our fighter.>

2: Seedlings

Linn, whose scout ship was farthest inward, compared his telemetry with the other scouts.

Olassa warships had formed three small commands. They intended to approach the invaders' mining sites from alternate directions.

<Beryl, Genoa, my ship will intercept the command making its way below the ecliptic,> Linn sent.

<We'll head off the group of ships hoping to use the outward ice giant to disguise their approach,> Beryl sent. Her emotional algorithms produced a sympathetic simulation for the Olassa commanders. They were hopelessly outmatched by the invaders' capabilities, but that didn't stop them from trying to defend their system.

<Then we'll take the command that's working its way around the outer belt,> Genoa sent.

Linn and his companions perused the Olassa translation app that Killian had transferred from the city-ship. The SADEs composed myriad messages, discarding most. While they worked through their choices, they received a link from Julien. It led them to a series of possible communications to send the Olassa.

Linn's ship was the first scout to contact one of three Olassa commands headed outward.

A single Olassa warship led three armed transports. At their present rate of acceleration, the SADEs calculated that the command would take about twenty-one Omnian days to reach the outer belt.

The SADEs positioned their ship bow to bow in front of the warship, while they reversed course to remain a fixed distance from the Olassa ship.

The first message that Julien indicated was sent from the scout's controller to the hull sensors and was transmitted in ultrasonic frequencies.

“Mandator, a seedling ship has appeared ahead of us,” the executor announced, stalks quivering in excitement.

“By the Light,” the mandator exclaimed, as bloom bent to examine the panel’s output.

The blooms of the crew focused on panels, which displayed the ship in front of them. Undoubtedly, it was similar to the seedling that had been captured many annuals ago. At that time, its progenitors had come from beyond to rescue it.

“Could it be the same seedling?” a monitor asked in wonder.

“It does possess the same characteristics of the seedling that wandered here last time,” the mandator replied. “See how it maneuvers.”

“Maybe it announces the progenitors —” the executor started to communicate, when a monitor interrupted.

“Message from the seedling ship, Mandator,” the monitor broadcasted strongly.

“How is that possible?” the mandator inquired.

“The seedling’s hull is sending a message in ultrasonic frequencies,” the monitor replied.

“Play it,” the mandator ordered.

Over the ship’s central panels, the Olassa observed the scout’s message. It said, “Our warship fleet has arrived at the Worlds of Light. The Omnian leaders will confront the entities that besiege your system. We ask you to seek areas of safety, preferably in orbits around the World of Light.”

“By the Light,” the mandator emanated. “We’ve an excellent message from the seedling, but we’ve no means of responding to the Omnians aboard.”

“A second message, Mandator,” a monitor warned.

The Olassa panels broadcast, “Another Omnian ship will soon arrive at the World of Light, and it will land atop Mesa Control. Our leaders will communicate through the individuals on that ship to your leaders, who can signal Olassa ships.”

“Perhaps, Mandator, your bloom should share another wish to induce the seedling ship to grant your desire,” the executor quipped.

“It’s easy to forget the advanced level of this race’s technology,” the mandator shared. “To our beneficence, and despite the fact that the Omnians are animals, they add much value to the Light.”

The monitors of the Olassa ship’s central station waited for a succeeding message from the seedling ship, but none was received.

“Signal the ships in our command,” the mandator emanated. “We’re reversing course and returning to the World of Light. Share the Omnians’ messages.”

“By the Light,” the executor intoned via the bloom, confirming the order, and a monitor connected the executor to the three armed transports.

By the time Killian’s ship, the *Vivian’s Mirror*, made orbit around the Olassa home world, Beryl and Genoa’s scouts had turned back their commands.

Killian’s ship carefully recorded the vessels and structures around the Olassa home world.

<More warships and more platforms,> Bethley noted to her companions.

<The amounts represent escalations for the Olassa,> Trium commented, <but this race is woefully unprepared to repel any moderately armed force, much less one as sophisticated and powerful as the present invaders.>

<What should concern us is whether we’re sufficiently prepared to repel this race,> Killian sent.

Killian’s comment quieted the other two SADEs.

The *Mirror* completed its survey of the home world and transmitted the telemetry to the *Freedom*.

Trium accessed the coordinates for Mesa Control and shared them with Killian and Bethley. Then Killian directed the *Mirror* there.

<During first contact, Alex, Renée, and Julien dealt with the mandators,> Bethley pointed out. <Our best contact would be Scarlet Mandator, but that Olassa might be aboard a warship.>

<Then again, Scarlet Mandator might have been with the early commands that tried to repel the invaders,> Trium volunteered.

<We'll let Dassata, Ser, and Julien manage the communications,> Killian advised. <Our task is to identify the Ollassa decision-makers and establish contact.>

Although the shell surface of a scout ship was similar to a traveler, the *Mirror*, like all scouts, was a significantly longer ship. The addition of a clam-shell-encased interstellar drive was the primary reason for the greater length.

Killian hovered the *Mirror* a hundred meters over the mesa top. Ollassa shuttles crowded every launch tube across the rock.

<It appears we'll need the ladder after all,> Trium sent. There was an element of triumph in his communications. It had been his idea to store the device within the ship's portable airlock system that had been added in alliance space.

Killian sent the sound of bird tweets in response to Trium's declaration. His scout companion had the foresight to examine the potential landing site from archival telemetry, before they'd completed the passage to the Ollassa system.

Recognizing the challenge of finding space on the mesa top, Trium constructed a compact metal alloy ladder. It was fifty meters in length, and it neatly rolled in a ball.

When Bethley had questioned the purpose of the ladder, Trium had replied, <Killian assures me that Alex will send us to the Ollassa home world. The ladder is in preparation to exit our craft.>

<Did you receive orders, Killian?> Bethley had sent.

<Not yet, but we will,> Killian had replied confidently.

Now, the *Mirror* lowered slowly near the mesa top's edge. At twenty-five meters above the ground, Killian directed the controller to remain on station. Then he signaled the portable airlock open, eliminating the safety protocols to allow both hatches open.

With a shove of Killian's hand, the ladder rolled through the opening and dropped to the ground.

As there was only sufficient space for a scout SADE to exit the ship head first or board feet first, Killian crawled through the open hatch, levered his body over the airlock's outer edge, and grasped the nearest rung

of the ladder. Then he rolled his body out of the ship to hang by his hands. Swiveling his handholds, Killian faced the ladder, and then descended to the mesa's surface.

Bethley and Trium swiftly followed, and the three SADEs faced a group of Ollassa. The SADEs' sensors detected the emanations from the Ollassa blooms. Unfortunately, those same sensors weren't capable of transmitting signals.

Trium produced a portable holo-vid, and Killian sent his first message. "Omnians have returned to confront the aggressors in your outer belt. We would speak with the mandators in charge of Mesa Control."

Stalks indicated the elevator that connected the surface with Mesa Control, which was buried deep in the massive rock outcrop.

Only one Ollassa, a tasker, led the SADEs below.

"Not much pomp and circumstance, this time," Bethley commented wryly to her companions.

"Our arrival evokes a casualness that seems in direct opposition to our first visit to the World of Light," Trium agreed.

"Then again, we never visited the Ollassa while they were using unarmed transports to fight the Nua'll sphere's bullet ships," Killian pointed out.

The elevator doors opened below into a brightly lit corridor deep in the mesa. The SADEs' sensors noted the ultraviolet light emanating from the overheads. The frequency of the light would feed the Ollassa fronds throughout their duty periods.

Blooms were tipped to the SADEs as they passed, but none of the Ollassa paused.

Doors slid aside, and the tasker's stalks indicated the opening.

Inside a busy control room, Scarlet Mandator turned toward the mesa's visitors. The mandator noticed their bodies were in the shape of Alex Racine and Renée de Guirnon. However, their facial colorings indicated they were of Julien's kind. They were neither fauna nor flora. The word SADE came back to the mandator.

Indicating with a stalk, Scarlet Mandator pointed at the doorway through which the SADEs had entered.

The Omnians stepped aside, as the Olassa who'd greeted them led them down the corridor.

For a moment, the SADEs weren't sure who they'd met. A quick comparison of the Olassa's bloom to that of Julien's imagery of Scarlet Mandator confirmed it was that individual who led them.

The mandator's stalk touched a wall panel, and the doors to a conference room slid aside. True to Olassa style, the room held a table, which was embedded with panels. However, there wasn't a single chair.

Scarlet Mandator turned and addressed the Omnians, "By the Light, we're pleased to see you again. Has the Omnian fleet come?"

"It has," Killian replied. He'd held up the portable holo-vid and created a link with his companions and Cordelia.

<Alex,> Cordelia sent, adding Renée and Julien to the conference link. <Killian has identified Scarlet Mandator. It's unknown whether the Olassa is the leader we need. There have been interesting changes that should be investigated.>

While Cordelia spoke, Julien initiated the holo-vid in the owner's suite. It replicated the imagery collected from Killian.

Julien sat across from Alex and Renée, and he sent their image to Killian's holo-vid.

"By the Light," Scarlet Mandator's bloom radiated, when the Omnians appeared in the holo-vid. Stalks were directed to approach the device that had been a wonder to the Olassa.

"We'd hoped for your return," the mandator beamed. "How is it that you knew we needed assistance?"

<Your pardon, Scarlet Mandator,> Alex sent, which Killian translated into ultrasonic frequencies for the holo-vid's output. <We left a probe in the far belt to warn of ships approaching the Worlds of Light.>

"My fronds and stalks should be quivering with anger for your impudence," the mandator replied.

<But they aren't,> Renée sent, <because you're a benevolent and forgiving race of flora.>

“And you’re a crafty animal, Renée de Guirnon,” the mandator retorted. The bloom’s petals curled and unfurled in quick succession. It intimated at the Ollassa’s pleasure not ire.

<Why do you appear different, Scarlet Mandator?> Renée sent.

“So, you’ve noticed,” the mandator replied. Directing stalks to turn, the mandator presented the torso sidewise to the holo-vid. Swiveling the bloom back to the SADEs, the mandator added, “The additions you see will answer your query about the individual you seek.”

<How did you come by those small blossoms?> Julien asked. He replaced Alex’s and Renée’s images with his own.

“Julien,” Scarlet Mandator radiated respectfully. “You ask the astute question. After your kind left the Worlds of Light, mandators argued about our future. There was little progress. It was suggested that each mandator ask their Life Giver for advice. The communications with the Life Givers lasted many passages of the Light.”

<Why so long?> Renée asked.

“It was unknown at the time,” the mandator replied. “Afterward, we believed that the Life Givers shared opinions.”

<Did you know it was possible for the Life Givers to communicate with one another?> Alex asked. He remembered the majestic tree that stood alone on a rise. There was no other Life Giver or tree near it.

“It was illuminating to us,” the mandator replied.

<Did we just hear a quip from the mandator?> Renée asked privately of the Omnians.

<Regard the petals,> Julien instructed, and he replayed a short section of the imagery. It showed the mandator’s petals briefly curling and unfurling.

<Are the flowers you wear the result of the Life Givers’ decision?> Alex asked.

“Flowers?” the mandator questioned.

Bethley stepped forward and indicated one of the unexpected colorful blossoms to the mandator that decorated the thickened stalk that made up the Ollassa’s body.

<Alex, be aware these aren't decorations in the customary sense,> Bethley sent. <They're growing from the mandator's body stalk.>

"The Life Givers decided that a single mandator should lead the Olassa," Scarlet Mandator radiated. "I was honored to be chosen."

<What do you call the colorful additions?> Renée asked.

"Crescents," the mandator replied. "For the first time in the knowledge of the Olassa, a mandator was requested to communicate directly with a Life Giver. My stalks connected with a root. I waited for a lengthy message, something that would direct me in my duties. I felt a brief tingle throughout every part of me. That was all. Then cycles of the Light later, the crescents started as tiny buds. Later, they opened to appear as you see them this cycle."

<Then you're the Olassa leader we seek,> Alex sent.

"I am," Scarlet Mandator replied.

<Do you remain a mandator?> Julien asked.

"Yes," the mandator replied. "A new title is unimportant. Olassa know that the Life Givers have spoken."

<How many ships did you lose in the attack on the mining sites, and how were they destroyed?> Alex asked.

"I would like to share tactical details with you," Scarlet Mandator radiated, the bloom petals curling slightly inward. "Unfortunately, many of the events are blurs, if not unknown."

<Explain,> Julien requested.

"Our warships arrived at several mining sites," the mandator replied. "We observed the actions below and realized that there were no beings involved in the workings of the machines. The mandators chose to fire on the machines. While preparing to attack, small ships exited the great carrier that sits in the beyond. The ships were swift, appearing as blurs on our panels. Within moments after arriving at the mining sites, the invaders' ships destroyed our warships."

<I'd like our SADEs to collect whatever imagery you've received from the warships that were under attack,> Alex requested.

"I will see that it's done," the mandator replied.

<You'll be receiving notices from the three commands that you sent outward to the mining sites,> Alex sent. <We turned them back with messages that we'll deal with the invaders, and we requested that they seek areas of safety, such as in orbit around the World of Light.>

"Your beneficence is of the Light," Scarlet Mandator radiated, and the bloom tilted down.

<We'll speak again soon,> Alex sent, and Killian closed the conference link to the *Freedom*.

Scarlet Mandator indicated the doorway with a stalk and led the SADEs back to the control room, pausing in the open doorway to request Mist Monitor follow.

In the corridor, Mist Monitor's bloom swung up and down the corridor.

<The monitor is searching for Renée,> Trium shared with his companions.

Killian linked with Cordelia and requested Renée's attention.

The group came to a halt when Renée's image, carried in ultrasonic frequencies, appeared in the holo-vid, and Mist Monitor's stalks froze in midstride.

<Greetings, Mist Monitor,> Renée sent. <I'm pleased to see you well.>

"Renée de Guirnon, I remember our meeting, as if the Light had shone brightly on me," the monitor radiated. "Will you be visiting the World of Light?"

<We must deal with your invaders first, Mist Monitor,> Renée sent. <There might be time afterward.>

"I will wish for it," the monitor replied, the petals gently shuddering.

Killian closed the link, and the group proceeded to an ancillary and smaller control room.

"Mist Monitor, share with our guests any information beamed from our warships at the mining sites," Scarlet Mandator requested.

The monitor accessed the Mesa Control data records, readied them on a panel, and then retreated. As expected, the SADE held the holo-vid and did as Julien had done. The oddly colored and marked SADE bent over

the panel, staring directly at it. Then the SADE controlled the rate of play, making an entire cycle of a ship's recording pass in moments.

Soon the SADE completed the recording, and Mist Monitor accessed a second warship's imagery. Within a relatively short period of time, the entire span of events as recorded from multiple warships was passed from Mesa Control databases to the SADE.

"Thank you, Mist Monitor," Killian said.

The Ollassa returned to the control center, and the SADEs followed. After entering the room, the SADEs sought discreet positions against a wall, locked their avatars, and waited for instructions.

My Books

Elvians is the twenty-second novel in the interwoven series of [The Silver Ships](#) and [Pyreans](#), which tell the stories of Earth colonists and the spread of humankind throughout a galaxy filled with alien races.

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 e-mail 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 (forthcoming)

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche
Veklocks

The Author



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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