

# WORLDS A PLENTY

Cercians Book 5

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S. H. JUCHA

*Chapters 1 & 2  
Excerpt*

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

## Glossary

A glossary is located at the end of the book.



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# 1: Thet Emergency

## CONCLAVE ADMIN, EARTH SOL SYSTEM

Julien received the extensive report from the first wave, which included the conversations with Carrier Commanding Officer Kios, the conversions of the Thet carriers to crude liners, the reconnaissance of Tellum's surface, and the planet's underground hydroponic farms. His kernel paused for a few ticks of time, while he ruminated on Sadie's expanding powers and what might be her limits.

When the report was received, Julien was at the Hyronzy site of the alliance congregation.

President K'attish had received a request to have the conclave establish a satellite administration location within alliance territory.

<How would this work?> K'attish inquired of Julien, who had sat across the desk in the president's office.

<Poorly,> Julien advised. <Alex had wrestled with the concept of the conclave for decades. After the Omnians discovered alliance territory, he repeatedly shared the idea with the Pyreans, the Jatouche, the Sylians, the Hyronzy, and other races. Many races wanted the conclave formed in their territory, offering reasons such as they were the larger area of space and it would be more convenient for their travel.>

<Yet, Alex never gave much credence to those arguments,> K'attish pointed out.

<He felt it would give too much power to the alliance,> Julien replied. <That's why he never volunteered the Confederation or Omnia as the conclave's site.>

<And Earth was unaffiliated,> K'attish offered.

<Just so,> Julien responded. <Earth had the added benefit of being central to the wider area of space that accommodated the other potential members of the conclave.>

K'attish had shared the alliance request with Julien, who read it and chuckled.

<It's a simple, formal request. What do you see that my cabinet and I didn't spot?> K'attish inquired. Her smile was warm and encouraging. This was the reason that she'd invited Julien to visit with her.

<Each alliance race has a specific manner of announcing their requests,> Julien replied. <This text has the earmarks of the Veklocks.>

<Which means what to you?> K'attish pressed.

<This is about credits and their accumulation,> Julien returned.

<Which seems to be the only thing the Veklocks love,> K'attish remarked. <This is a delicate matter. How do you think I should respond?>

<You must immediately end this,> Julien sent. <I suggest you send your emissary to address the alliance's reps.>

K'attish grinned. <When would my emissary be able to leave for the Hyronzy system?>

As Julien stood, he responded, <Now.>

K'attish left her chair and hurried around the desk. She fiercely hugged Julien, whispering, "Thank you."

<My pleasure, President K'attish,> Julien shared.

K'attish watched Julien exit her office. She breathed a huge sigh of relief, knowing that she didn't have an easy solution for the request. Before she returned to the work on her monitor, she thought, *What would we do without SADEs to provide continuity for the biological races?*

Cycles later, Julien stood before the alliance representatives, who congregated in their multitiered dome. As was the custom, he was inserted at the beginning of the next cycle's agenda the moment he alerted the admin of his coming.

<Thank you for allowing me to speak to you,> Julien began graciously. <As an emissary of conclave President K'attish, I've the opportunity to reply to a request to have a conclave satellite organization established in alliance territory.>

Julien recorded many of the reps' facial expressions. While the representatives had changed many times during his existence, he knew the races well. It was evident that most of the representatives were confused or surprised by his sharing.

<The president believes this to be an important matter, which requires the conclave respond in person,> Julien continued. <Thus, I address my remarks to the Veklock triumvirate.>

As the great tiered hall had been silent, the muted squawks of the female and her two mates were easily heard, and heads turned their way.

<The president thanks you for your request, but she and her ministers believe a satellite admin would be cumbersome. Keeping the home office and the alliance location in sync for decision-making and data would be inefficient,> Julien shared. <President K'attish is sympathetic to your desires, but she must decline the request. Do you have a response for me to carry to the president?>

The three Veklocks regarded the angry faces that surrounded them. Their attempt to pressure the president had failed miserably. Attempting to regain some semblance of dignity, the female, who led the triumvirate, rose.

<We thank Julien, despite his busy schedule, for taking the time to respond in person,> the female sent. <And we thank President K'attish for her response to our message, which was merely a thought in passing.>

Many representatives were mollified by the Veklock female's courteous treatment of Julien and the president's response.

It didn't go unnoticed that a few representatives weren't so tolerant of the charade. A Pyrean's grumble, a Jatouche's disdainful chitter, and a Sylian's soft growl were among the dissenters' noises.

<I'll convey your message of appreciation,> Julien promised the Veklocks. He tipped his head to the representative body and exited the dais.

The moment Julien entered the corridor, he chose to glide to the traveler bays to reach the Hyronzy dome. The news from the first wave required an urgent meeting with K'attish. However, he kept a pleasant expression on his face lest he disturb those who saw him hurry. His concern was the length of time for the report to have arrived, and the greater period of time it would take to render aid.

It was late evening, Earth conclave time, when Julien exited a Martian dome gate.

A dome operator alerted his supervisor, who responded too slowly to catch Julien boarding a traveler. Locating the pilot, the supervisor inquired, <Julien's destination, please?>

The Lemgart, Jadga afra Katnas, tossed her long, silvery hair from one side of her head to the other. Having graduated only recently from flight academy, she was already nervous about her august passenger. Now a dome supervisor was concerned about Julien's destination.

<Conclave admin,> the Lemgart female replied. <Do you have special instructions for me?>

<Julien will know it's dark at conclave headquarters. He isn't one to wake biologicals to deal with his needs,> the supervisor sent. <I just think it's rude to have Julien locking his avatar in the lobby until the president or ministers arrive.>

<What do you want me to do?> Jadga inquired nervously.

<Supervisor Bertram, it's kind of you to be concerned for me,> Julien interrupted. <My pilot is only four cycles on the job, which is why she has third shift. Allow me to communicate with her when I'm ready.>

<Apologies, Julien,> Bertram replied.

<None needed,> Julien returned. <You merely demonstrated a willingness to care for my well-being. That's an admirable trait that every individual should strive to adopt.>

Jadga was party to Julien's conversation with the supervisor. It surprised her that a SADE of his extraordinary experience would deign to take the time to soothe Bertram's and her nerves.

Julien had intended to wait in the conclave headquarters lobby for K'attish, as the supervisor had believed he would. However, he decided to do something else. Locating the traveler dome director, he requisitioned Jadga for several hours.

Afterward, Julien linked to Jadga and sent, <You and I will take, as Earthers used to say, a trip down memory lane.>

Jadga received coordinates, and she veered the ship toward Earth's eastern horizon. It confused her that there was no settlement or even a building at the coordinates she received.

<Jadga, hover a meter above the sands and ten meters up the beach from the lapping waves,> Julien instructed.

After Jadga did as she was told, she noted Julien trigger the hatch.

<Come,> Julien sent.

Jadga had marked her implant to record the moment she knew of Julien's approach to her traveler. Knowing that this trip would be extended, she spooled the growing file to the traveler's database.

Julien leapt through the hatchway to the packed sand. When Jadga appeared in the doorway, he held out his hands to her.

Such was Julien's reputation, that Jadga didn't hesitate. Rather than a timid hop to drop close to the hull, she bunched her legs and flew outward.

Julien laughed, as he caught the Lemgart and spun in a circle to slow her descent.

When Jadga's feet were on the sand, she stared at the ocean. It wasn't quiet. Instead, two-meter waves rolled inward to crash on the beach. <This is a memory for you?> she queried.

Julien's holo-vid lit, and he played the incident that took place in the ocean.

It was calmer then, and Jadga watched Swei Swee race off a cargo traveler to hit the water. She could hear their high-pitched celebration. <New seas,> she remarked.

<Nothing dearer to the Swei Swee than experiencing new, fecund waters,> Julien replied.

The scene shifted, and Swei Swee skimmed the waves, racing away from something.

When the view widened, Jadga saw the black-and-white shapes just beneath the surface.

<Orca pod,> Julien explained. <Intelligent carnivores.>

Jadga held her breath, while she watched the action play out. The Orca were temporarily dissuaded by the action of a traveler.

As the Swei Swee raced for the beach, the ship's ramp dropped. It touched the wavetops, and the Swei Swee shot aboard.

<Safe,> Jadga sighed, releasing her breath. <Were the Swei Swee traumatized?>

Julien chuckled. <You would have thought so after their harrowing escape,> he responded. <While they understood the danger that nearly ended their lives, they accepted it was just one of those deadly encounters that they successfully evaded.>

<I guess that's the nature of their lives,> Jadga mused. <Lemgarts don't swim, and you'd never catch me getting my feet wet.>

Sol was rising above the horizon, and Julien let the memories from his kernel flow. He conversed with Alex and Renée. He listened to the de Long twins tease each other. Tatia and Alex discussed strategies against an enemy. Then his most coveted memory played.

Alex met with his closest friends, and he explained his theory that the occupants of the dark travelers might be captives of another race.

Few believed that was possible, but Alex was too important to them to argue the point.

After capturing a dark traveler, Alex and Mickey Brandon were out of the *Rêveur* before anyone could object.

Planting two-way acoustical devices on the hull and spending a full cycle sharing the basics of communication, it was discovered that the occupants, the Swei Swee, were indeed captives of the Nua'll.

Méridiens and New Terrans privately rejoiced that their leader had saved them from executing a suborned race.

Checking the time, Julien realized that the conclave admin would be arriving at headquarters. Utilizing the building's internal security system, he noted that President K'attish was in her office.

<Time to go,> Julien sent to Jadga.

<I'm honored to have shared this moment with you, Julien,> Jadga returned. <It's brought the past alive in a manner that I couldn't have imagined, and I'm deeply sorry for you.>

<Why is that?> Julien inquired, as the pair made for the ship.

<So many old friends. So many memories, and all the biologicals gone,> Jadga explained.

Beneath the open hatch, Julien helped Jadga to the first step.

<That's one of the advantages of being a SADE, Jadga,> Julien counseled. <With our sensors and our recordings, we can live again with our friends whenever we feel the need. Who knows? One cycle, you might be requested to produce a SADE.>

Jadga chuckled at the thought, as she rapidly climbed the steps.

Julien took a last look at the rolling waves, smiled, and leapt to the hatchway.

Aware that Julien had allowed her to sleep but was headed her way moments after she'd sat behind her desk, K'attish signaled her administrator and cleared her schedule for a half hour.

When asked the first time to make room for Julien in K'attish's schedule, the administrator had inquired, <Will you want an hour?>

K'attish had chuckled and replied, <Julien is nothing but concise. He doesn't waste words. However, it might take me cycles, weeks, or months to resolve the problem he lands on my desk.>

Jadga set her traveler down in the VIP slot in front of the admin building's grand steps.

<Good fortune to you, my young friend,> Julien sent, as he exited the ship.

<May the stars protect you, Julien,> Jadga returned. She quickly lifted and headed for Mars.

K'attish watched Julien's progress to her office. It was always an indication of the nature of what he brought to her attention. He never glided through the halls, but it was a measure of the length of time he spent greeting people. In this case, he was polite but brief, and K'attish prepared for difficult news.

Regardless of her trepidation, as an empath, K'attish followed her training. Even though Julien was a SADE, she rose and greeted him with a hug. She knew he recorded her soothing sensations, and she wouldn't deny him that element of curiosity about empaths' power.

<How bad?> K'attish asked, as she returned to her seat.

<Admiral Pappas has formed alliances with two Onda factions, Kega and Juta,> Julien began. <By the time the first wave tracked the Thet, who had deserted their military base, Thet carriers had returned to their home world. From there, the news gets worse.>

<Fighting?> K'attish queried.

<Starvation,> Julien responded.

<But the Onda are a technologically sophisticated race,> K'attish objected.

<The defenders characterize the Thet population as selfish and obstinate. The home world, Tellum, has little space with which to grow crops, and the underground hydroponic farms are collapsing from failure to isolate genetic strains.>

<What are their options?> K'attish inquired.

<It's believed they have none,> Julien replied. He paused to let the president absorb his announcement and ask her questions.

A few minutes later, K'attish leaned into her chair. <You mentioned the carriers. What about the dreadnaughts?>

<Those ships are at the other two home worlds. Thet Carrier Commanding Officer Kios has said that conditions on those worlds might be no better than Tellum,> Julien explained.

<Immediate options?> K'attish queried.

<None,> Julien replied.

<Populations?> K'attish asked.

<Salus estimates that the three worlds might exceed eleven trillion,> Julien lamented.

<Tellum's status?> K'attish pressed.

<The carriers and the population are on three-quarter rations now,> Julien returned. <By the end of the next two annuals, they'll be at half rations. The only exceptions are for pregnant females.>

K'attish's thought was that the females would be producing more mouths to feed, which would only exacerbate the problem. But she kept that thought to herself.

Taking more time to think, K'attish inquired, <Can any of this be laid at the feet of Admiral Pappas for her aggressive action?>

<On the contrary, Admiral Pappas has done an exemplary job of stopping the raiding of local populations. In addition, she's mitigated the mercenaries' challenges by aiding their trade potentials to generate sales and investments. Furthermore, they are turning their bases into crop productive worlds,> Julien returned.

K'attish waved away her question. Julien's answer had been swift, which indicated to her that he hadn't liked the nature of her query.

<Earlier, you spoke about the attitudes of the Thet citizens. What are the issues there?> K'attish asked.

<Several comments in the report indicated the unwillingness of Thet citizens to make compromises to manage their food struggle,> Julien replied. <They continued to expand their residential footprint across the planet. They required hydroponic farms to be created near them with the complete line of offerings, regardless of the possibility of crop failure from contamination.>

<Then despite how we might plan to help the Thet, they might not want it,> K'attish surmised.

<That's the thinking among first wave principals,> Julien admitted.

Hoping to recover some goodwill with Julien, K'attish queried, <How is the admiral taking this debacle?>

<To her credit, she and others convinced Kios to work with the conclave without the approval of the other commanding officers,> Julien returned. He smiled at the details of the lengthy report. <The carriers were turned into liners. Quadrants arrived, and Thet females were recruited for the effort on Elite worlds.>

<Your smile says some individuals deserve a little more credit than others,> K'attish sent. <Who would that be?>

<Sadie's power continues to grow,> Julien shared, his smile widening. <When Kios was rude with the admiral, she snatched him from his carrier and delivered him to Mila's bridge. The poor Onda couldn't handle the mind-blowing event, and he fainted.>

K'attish chuckled. <I hope to experience a shift one of these cycles,> she remarked.

<I understand that the Kega Base Commanding Officer Orgeth has never failed to be instrumental in furthering Mila's efforts,> Julien added.

<Well, hiring some Thet females won't make a dent in the planet's food shortages,> K'attish opined. <Moving that many individuals would take a mammoth effort on the part of the conclave. Worse, where do we move them?>

As the president's comments were musings and her question rhetorical, Julien waited for her to advance a solution. This was a necessity. Only the conclave could marshal the necessary resources to save the Thet populations.

<It would seem that Tellum, at least, would have approached collapse without our interference in that area of space. Would you agree?> K'attish mused.

<If you're asking does the conclave have responsibility for Tellum's condition, the answer is no,> Julien stated definitively. <At worst, we probably accelerated the population's collapse by a few annuals. Everything I've absorbed from the report indicates that the Thet failed to create a fallback plan.>

K'attish, as a powerful descendant of Harbour, was known for her sublime control. Yet, faced with a calamity that approached trillions of Thet, she placed her head in her hands. After a few minutes, she dropped her hands and stared at Julien.

<Let's put aside the resources necessary to accomplish this enormous task,> K'attish shared. <What will it take to save the Thet?>

After Julien had received the report, he'd continuously run through scenarios. In this moment, several pieces fell together, and he smiled gently at K'attish.

"Thank the stars," K'attish murmured gratefully.

<There might be a way to make this effort more efficient than I had imagined,> Julien began. <Elite have left huge swaths of their planets to the hamlet subs, due to their subsistence farming methods. We transport a third of each planet's population to Elite worlds.>

<To do what?> K'attish inquired.

<Not to help the subs,> Julien declared. <Several individuals in the report mention the selfish attitudes. This must be cured, and we'll do it by teaching them to grow their own crops.>

<They could refuse to cooperate,> K'attish pointed out.

<This will require SADEs to provide oversight. Their rations will depend on their cooperation,> Julien replied.

<Cold,> K'attish commented.

<Learn to farm on an Elite world, or starve to death on your own worlds,> Julien returned.

<Could we ask for volunteers?> K'attish queried.

<That would be nice, but it doesn't fit my plan,> Julien responded.

At which point, K'attish held up her hands and leaned into her chair.

<We designate a third of each Thet planet as usurped land. Citizens must leave that space,> Julien explained, which had K'attish's eyes briefly widen. <While those citizens learn to farm, those buildings are razed and a large section of the populace lives in rudimentary structures, while they learn to grow crops.>

<In the meantime, we have to provide substantial freighter runs to deliver additional rations,> K'attish pointed out.

<The point about freighters is true,> Julien admitted, <but there is one asset in our favor. The directors, managers, and workers in the hydroponic gardens have been treated as if they were in servitude to the citizens. We would elevate them.>

<So, we improve progress on the Elite worlds with Thet. At the same time, we rehabilitate their worlds. Is one-third enough?> K'attish asked.

<Doubtful,> Julien replied. <I foresee the remaining residents falling back on old ways whenever the opportunity presents itself.>

<Then we need a contract,> K'attish stated unequivocally.

<Undoubtedly,> Julien affirmed. <The citizens must vote to accept the contract, and there will be but the one option.>

<That a civilization should come to this, destroying their planet by overpopulating it, is hard to comprehend,> K'attish lamented. Taking a breath and slowly releasing it, she inquired, <Do you have a contract?>

<Yes,> Julien replied.

<What about resources?> K'attish pressed.

<I've listed them in another document,> Julien replied, sending both to K'attish.

<I'll assemble my ministers for an emergency meeting tomorrow. I could use you for the presentation,> K'attish sent.

<I'll be there,> Julien promised.

<Afterward, I must address the conclave representatives,> K'attish added. <They must approve this venture. If I get the reps' approval, who delivers the contract to Tellum?>

Julien smiled at K'attish and winked, which had her laughing.

<Admiral Pappas,> K'attish supplied.

<No one knows the problem better than her and her supporters,> Julien pointed out. <The comments in the reports indicate that Mila and the defenders won't have much sympathy for the Thet plight. They won't be dissuaded by pushback from the civilians.>

K'attish chuckled about affronted Thet meeting a resistant admiral and her defenders. Suddenly, her chuckle died. <The resources list ...> she managed to send.

<It must seem like an impossible task,> Julien returned. <However, those efforts are shared out during the first annual. Admittedly, the resources will be front-loaded. After that, the production of crops will lessen the effort.>

K'attish linked to her assistant and requested an emergency meeting of the ministers and a presentation slot in the conclave representatives' agenda.

Julien rose, tipped his head, and exited the office.

K'attish's discomfort was evident in that she'd not given Julien the hug he deserved, and she made a mental note to compensate for that tomorrow. For now, she closed her gate and her implant to center herself. It took much longer to achieve the balance she sought, but it did come. It was her belief in the SADEs, epitomized by Julien and others of Alex's time, which gave her confidence that even the most momentous tasks could be undertaken and resolved.

The following morning, a majority of the ministers were unsettled by Julien's presentation to them. The defensive efforts at Cercia and the

supplies required for the mercenary worlds had already taxed conclave resources.

<Do you have a different idea how to help the Thet?> K'attish queried.

Despite expecting it, K'attish was disturbed by the ministers' silence. She queried, <Are you advocating that we ignore their plight?> This time she heard her ministers' protestations.

<Help me understand your quandaries?> K'attish sent with soothing waves.

<You're asking us to commit huge resources for many annuals to save societies who have ignored our basic tenets,> the finance minister pointed out. <How do we benefit from that?>

Julien lit his holo-vid, and he projected a product, which gently spun in the air.

<What's that?> the resources minister inquired.

<It's a device that will analyze the nature of materials on asteroids and moons,> Julien replied.

<We've already got various instruments to do that,> the minister indicated.

Julien dubiously regarded his display, which had K'attish and a few ministers hiding their smiles. <My error,> he remarked apologetically. Then his other palm holo-vid lit. <This is the other portion of the instrument.>

No one was foolish enough to ask another question.

Noting that he had the ministers' complete attention, Julien sent, <You place the instrument on one side of an asteroid. The receiving unit goes on the other side. After achieving alignment, you have the analysis of what the projection found in the asteroid.>

Questions bombarded Julien about the device. Was it proven? How large an asteroid could be analyzed? Could the sending device and the receiver be moved in tandem around the asteroid?

K'attish knew that Julien's fundamental point hadn't been perceived. She felt it incumbent on her to ask, <Who invented this device, and how will it be distributed?>

<This is a Metter product, and a group of conclave members have exclusive rights to act as distributors,> Julien replied calmly.

<It's a spider product?> a minister dubiously muttered. Immediately, he was inundated with condemnations from the other ministers.

Julien and K'attish stared quietly at the errant individual.

Feeling the heat, the minister rose and sent, <President K'attish, I wish to submit my resignation forthwith.>

K'attish gazed around the table. She saw nods of approval. <Resignation accepted,> she replied.

The ex-minister couldn't leave the conference room fast enough.

<I would urge this table to understand the complex relations developing in this new area of space,> Julien sent. Then he played a vid received from Dimitri.

K'attish and the ministers were entranced by the young human female who appeared to adore the giant Metters. In turn, the Metters not only tolerated her attentions but also were pleased by them.

<The young woman is Sadie,> Julien shared.

<The Cercian with the unique capabilities?> the development minister inquired.

<The same,> Julien responded. <And her powers have never ceased growing. Thanks in part to her efforts, Admiral Pappas managed to make inroads with the Thet without firing a shot.>

While the ministers thought about the revelations, Julien projected a small Onda. <This is Kega Base Commanding Officer Orgeth. He's another reason for Mila's success with the Onda factions. The cross-racial comraderies are many, and they speak to the unusual environment in this area of space. If you were to decide not to help Thet societies, the alliances that have already been established would crumble. The local races and our forces would believe the conclave to be untrustworthy. Don't forget. We've hundreds of SADEs working diligently for these races.>

Julien's last statement drove his message home. The ministers didn't fear the SADEs. They feared the loss of the SADEs' allegiance. It was well-known that Cordelia, Hector, Trixie, Adrian, Claire, Cremsylon, Miranda, and Z were among the many SADEs assisting the races and fighting the aggressors in that region.

There was more work to do with the ministers before K'attish secured their votes.

In contrast, the conclave representatives overwhelmingly approved the proposal. Many newer members remembered what the conclave's arrival meant to them, and none were a more impassioned species than Queller Representative Iltaft.

## 2: Indelicate Choice

### TELLUM PLANET

### THET SYSTEM

The first wave had accompanied the Thet carrier fleet and the Quadrants on two crossings to the Elite worlds, easing the load on Kelley's workforce. He assigned the Thet females to support the efforts on Da-fer and Jot-ma.

Mila's forces were on return to Tellum when Salus requested her attention.

<Admiral, a message has been relayed to us from Julien,> Salus reported. <It's lengthy, but the entirety is critical, and it involves Thet worlds.>

Mila chose to finish her meal, knowing that she would need the reserves. Checking with Escher, she learned that the defenders had finished eating.

<Defenders, Peña, Sven, and Orgeth, assemble for a meeting aboard the *Storyteller*,> Mila sent. <Sadie, we'll need Kios. Afterward, come for me.>

When Sadie arrived aboard Kios's carrier, she received a round of welcoming growls from the ship commander and the bridge crew.

The telemetry officer swiftly left his seat and headed for the commanding officer's cabin. Shortly, Kios and the officer returned.

Kios regarded Sadie with a quizzical expression.

Sadie shrugged her shoulders, and she demonstrated a salute.

Kios nodded. To the bridge crew, he said, "Apparently, the admiral wants a conference." Then he offered his hand to Sadie.

Despite Sadie's appearance to shift Kios many times, it still received subtle bewildering growls.

When the conference group was ready, Dimitri spooled the message onto the table's holo-vid. Kios followed along with the controller's translation delivered via the holo-vid.

At the end of the long presentation, individuals were quick to request a replay. This included those with implants. Frequently, Julien's dialog was stopped for questions to be asked.

With the final request to repeat the presentation finished, Kios dubiously stared at the assembled team. "Is this possible?" he queried.

"It's Julien's plan," Dimitri replied simply.

"And who is this Julien?" Kios inquired.

Among the participants, only Peña, a first-gen sister, had the longevity to accurately speak about Julien. "One human dreamed of creating the conclave," she explained. "However, this wouldn't have occurred to him until he met a SADE, trapped aboard a derelict liner, who would become his best friend. This opened his understanding of other races."

"And this friend was Julien?" Kios queried.

"Yes, it was," Peña replied.

Kios gazed around the table. Pride was evident on many faces at the mention of the friendship of Alex and Julien. With a shrug, he eyed Mila, and asked, "How do we get started?"

Mila burst out laughing. <I'm the least qualified to answer that question, Commander,> she returned. <However, I'll quiz my advisors for you.> Then she stared intently at the defenders, Peña, and Sven, which generated more laughter.

<Sell it to Tellum first or make for one of the other Thet home worlds?> Sven inquired.

Eyes turned to regard Kios, who remarked, "That's a difficult question."

<Why?> Shoya asked.

"You've made progress with Tellum. We're moving females to help the hamlet subs, but, other than that, you've made no significant demand on the population," Kios responded. "I think you'd get the same response from Tellum as you would from Bakrate or Pasmode, where the dreadnaughts are stationed."

<Which would be what?> Shoya pressed.

"No matter the Thet world, the citizens would reject such a plan," Kios replied confidently.

<If they choose not to accept our help, that's their right,> Mila stated simply.

"What's the next option?" Kios queried hopefully. His expectant face crumbled as he examined the sad expressions on others. "This is the only plan?" he inquired.

"You heard that Julien had designed this plan," Dimitri said aloud. "As a SADE, who has seen more of history than you can imagine, he would have designed the best means of saving your populations. It's possible he was unable to find another solution."

"What are we to do if the citizens reject this plan?" Kios implored.

Into the stillness, Ceda asked, <What if we get one world to agree but not the others?>

<Same problem,> Peña interjected. <We help whoever wants to be saved.>

Orgeth's soft growl drew attention. "Kios, you're looking at this problem upside down," he said. "The conclave and you want this enormous enterprise to succeed. Look around you. Do you see Julien or President K'attish?"

Kios numbly shook his head.

"Why do you think they're absent?" Orgeth inquired.

"Maybe, they think it's hopeless," Kios half-heartedly offered, which had Orgeth humorously growling.

"Commander Kios," Orgeth snapped. "Your citizens are in trouble. They're about to do something extremely dangerous. If they were new crew members, and you saw them in trouble, what would you do?"

With Orgeth's command voice, he had Kios straightening in his chair.

"I'd issue orders, and take them to task," Kios replied with alacrity. He glanced at the faces arrayed around the table. Heads were nodding in agreement.

<You said the military directs Tellum's leaders,> Escher pointed out. <Perhaps, it's time the citizens hear from you and their leaders as to the dire situation about to befall them. Afterward, offer them this one way out.>

"Tellum leaders are careful not to antagonize the citizenry," Kios remarked.

<In other words, Tellum's leaders won't tell the truth,> Gat'r declared.

“Sadly, yes,” Kios admitted. He’d gotten used to taking in the faces surrounding him to gauge the conversation’s direction. This time, they were fixed on him but without rancor, and he understood the situation. There was one way out for the citizens, and there was only one person who could lay out the hard truth to them.

Kios nodded his acceptance. “We’d better get started, Admiral. How can we best accomplish this?”

Again, Mila gazed at her team.

<We need not one but four or five of the hydroponic directors,> Ceda sent. <They’d make good witnesses.>

“Hardly,” Kios lamented. “They’ll be a reticent lot.”

<You weren’t listening to Ceda,> Shoya pointed out. <She said they’d be witnesses.>

<Accident aboard ship. Several crew members involved. What does the ship’s commander do?> Escher queried.

“Understood,” Kios replied, the nature of his presentation becoming clear. If he was to save his race, he must force them to realize their dire circumstances.

<You won’t like what I have to say, Commander,> Mila sent. <If, despite your efforts, the population is reticent to take the one way out you offer, there would be a place on an Elite planet for your crews and their families. In time, I’m sure you could travel to other worlds.>

“That’s a sad option,” Kios admitted. “We might as well start with Tellum. This will give us an opportunity to sharpen our presentation with a population who has some familiarity with us.”

For another hour, the discussion centered around how to present this critical moment to Tellum.

With many issues unresolved, Mila’s frustration grew. <Too much planning with too many variables,> she pointed out. <Let’s see who we can collect from Tellum to bolster Kios’s message, set the broadcast date and time, and give it a shot.>

Relief was evident on faces, except for that of Kios.

Shrugging his shoulders at the inevitable that was coming his way, Kios asked, “What would be the most appropriate setting?”

<Storyteller bridge, vid and audio,> Escher quickly supplied. Immediately, that suggestion was accepted by Peña, Sven, and the other defenders.

“If you think it will help,” Kios said, feeling completely out of his depth.

While Kios expected much of the preparations to be handled virtually, the admiral and her team had other ideas. By now, he had a cabin on the *Storyteller* to facilitate the planning.

One morning, Merlie escorted Kios from his cabin to the bay level to board a traveler.

The only others aboard were the defenders, who waved to him. Orgeth patted the seat next to him.

Kios settled into the nanites seat, regarded Orgeth, and queried, “It begins?”

“We’re dropping in on Tellum’s leaders, who are meeting within the hour,” Orgeth replied.

“No advance warning?” Kios inquired.

“The situation doesn’t call for subtleties and protocol,” Orgeth replied. “We’ve this one chance to convince an entire world of the need to transform their society and their planet.”

Kios nodded slowly. While he wasn’t convinced of this approach, he had to admit that the conclave had more experience in these types of drastic situations than he possessed.

Having access to Tellum’s communication net, Marianne focused on the meeting location’s coordinates.

Merlie projected their destination to Kios, who frowned.

“Problem?” Merlie asked.

“That’s not an official government building,” Kios commented.

<Then why meet there?> Shoya asked.

“Unknown,” Kios replied.

<At this point, I’d be curious about the agenda,> Gat’r remarked, focusing on Dimitri.

Not much later, Dimitri responded, <There’s no official record of a meeting date, time, or agenda on the government servers.>

<Now that's interesting,> Ceda remarked. <Kios, any idea why the leaders want to meet secretly?>

Kios slowly shook his head. "If there's no official record, how did you find out about this meeting?" he asked.

"Personal communications," Merlie replied.

"The leaders won't like that you monitored their comms devices," Kios warned.

Orgeth growled menacingly, which had Kios shrinking away from him. "We're trying to save Thet civilization, and you're worried about affronting Tellum's leaders. With that attitude, you won't convince anyone to participate."

Kios's head briefly hung.

<Kios, think of this as a battle,> Shoya encouraged.

"A battle?" Kios dubiously queried. "Who's the enemy?"

<Your citizens. They're about to engage your forces, and you know they'll lose,> Shoya continued. <You've opened communications with them. What do you tell them?>

Having had the upcoming scenario put in circumstances that suited his training, Kios mused on Shoya's concept. He regarded her and replied, "I'd do everything I could to convince them to surrender."

<When you speak to any Tellum Thet, keep that thought in mind,> Shoya sent. <If your planet's population doesn't surrender, they'll face slow and ugly annihilation.>

Kios glanced at Orgeth, who flashed his canines. It was an Onda signal to be ready to fight. Kios nodded forcefully to Shoya and said, "We must fight for them to surrender for their own good."

Shoya received multiple congratulations on finding a way to bolster Kios's courage to stand firmly against the onslaught of negative opinions that would be coming his way.

The traveler couldn't land. Instead, Marianne floated it above a vehicle intersection, which stopped automated traffic. The ramp dropped, and the team quickly exited.

The coordinates had marked a residential building with business offices on the top floors.

Dimitri made short work of the door panel's security.

In the lobby, the team waited for Marianne to circle the building.

<Third floor down from the top,> Amalima sent. <The leaders are in an office on the opposite side from you. Heads up, they've spotted the ship and are abandoning the meeting.>

Merlie, Orgeth, and the Naiads chuckled darkly.

<Dimitri, any way to exit this building except through the lobby?> Escher inquired.

<No floors lower than this level,> Dimitri replied. <Street public transport is the only means of travel from here.>

Orgeth updated Kios, who bewilderingly shook his head.

"The enemy is planning a subversive move, Commander," Orgeth whispered to Kios, borrowing from Shoya's analogy.

Kios's eyes narrowed. After a moment to think, he responded, "We must discover their intentions to prevent them from undermining the surrender."

"Just so," Orgeth agreed, pleased to hear Kios holding close to the analogy.

The doors of an elevator car opened and the Thet leaders scrambled out and raced across the lobby. When they spotted the group of aliens, they slid to a halt. Staring wildly around, they spotted the lobby's rear exit and ran in that direction.

Suddenly, an alien female appeared in front of them. The leaders didn't perceive that a female represented a threat. However, it was the way she materialized out of the air that discomfited them.

While the leaders thought on their predicament, a blur passed them, and another alien female stood with the first one. Turning around, they found a level of comfort with the two Ondas accompanying the first group of aliens.

Merlie and Sadie walked behind the leaders, as they approached the rest of the team.

Orgeth hoped that Kios would be the first to speak, and he was relieved to hear the commander demand, "Are you meeting in private about Tellum business?" The wide-eyed expressions told Kios the answer. "That's a dereliction of your duties. Come with me."

Kios turned and walked toward the lobby exit. He didn't bother to see if the leaders followed him. This was an instance when he again felt the collaborative nature of the conclave, and he was determined to focus on that.

"Where are we going?" one of the leaders plaintively asked.

Kios refused to respond.

Outside, Marianne interrupted the automated traffic to drop the ramp.

Kios halted at the ramp's edge. "Get aboard," he directed the leaders.

With aliens at their backs, the leaders could see that they weren't being offered a choice.

Merlie motioned to seats in the middle of the rows, and the leaders dutifully took them.

Kios sat next to Orgeth and inquired, "Where to now?"

"It's the team's intent to collect some hydroponic farm directors or managers," Orgeth responded.

"Not both from a single farm in the event that there's a problem," Kios cautioned.

Orgeth tapped his temple. "Your advice has been shared," he said.

Marianne chose three farm locations. As usual, there was no place to land. Foot and vehicle traffic covered the pathways and roadways.

Merlie and Dimitri exited the ship and made their way into the market, found the elevator, and rode it down to the farm level. As the conclave had visited this farm before, their visit didn't cause a commotion.

When the manager was informed of the need for him to participate in a broadcast planetwide, he blew out a breath in relief. "It's about time," he remarked. Using his comms device, he informed the farm's director that he would be accompanying the conclave. Before the director could reply, the manager cut the connection and grinned at Merlie and Dimitri.

It was remarkably easy for Merlie and Dimitri to recruit another manager and a director. Like the first manager, the other two were anxious to communicate the food urgency to the entire populace.

As the managers and the director boarded the traveler, the leaders looked entirely uneasy. And, as opposed to where the leaders sat, the farming They were welcomed to the first rows to sit across the aisle from Kios and Orgeth.

Among Kios, Orgeth, and the new passengers there were excited conversations about the opportunity to get the message out.

When Marianne landed aboard the *Storyteller*, the Thet, except for Kios, were ushered to a large conference room.

Speaking to the team, Kios inquired, "Is there work to do, or do we broadcast now?"

"We need to have the leaders' cooperation first," Merlie explained.

The team talked to Kios about what was planned on the way to the conference room. Kios appreciated that he had a minor role to play.

When everyone was assembled, Dimitri explained to the planetary Thet the broadcast to take place.

"You can't," Hestar, a Tellum leader declared. "You'll either cause a panic, or the citizenry will recall us."

"We've already announced and implemented the required ration cuts," Yucas, another leader pointed out.

"How can the citizens exist on three-quarter or, later, half rations?" Zerfa, a hydroponic farm manager, queried.

"That question is rhetorical," Operg, the hydroponic farm director, said. "The three of us, who are responsible for hydroponic farms and who know they're failing, would like to know what you're going to do when anarchy rules the planet."

The leaders gawked at Operg, as if she had blasphemed.

"Do you doubt it's coming?" Operg asked.

"When speaking to the populace, there's no need to go that far," Hestar stated imperially.

The hydroponic trio regarded one another before they laughed derisively.

Operg turned toward Merlie. She shrugged, as if to suggest there was little you can you do with close-minded individuals such as these.

"Leaders, we're waiting to hear how you'll save the population from eventual starvation," Peña said.

"You're not hearing us," Hestar objected. "There is time to avert disaster."

"And how will you accomplish this miracle?" Dimitri asked.

"We were working on that when you interrupted us," Yucas replied.

“Why meet in secret?” Amalima queried.

“So as not to cause panic,” Hestar returned.

“Shouldn’t your citizens learn what you’re proposing?” Amalima pressed.

“When we have a solid plan, we’ll announce it,” the third leader stated, as if that should be the end of the discussion.

It required Shoya to harshly confront the leaders. <The three of you are liars,> she sent. <You haven’t any idea how to prevent the disaster that’s coming, because you can’t develop a workable concept with the resources you possess.>

“That’s true,” Orgeth commented, eyeing the three leaders.

Privately, Ceda queried, <Do we want to exclude the leaders from the broadcast?>

<Negative,> Orgeth replied firmly. <The Thet population must see their leaders. Otherwise, the broadcast lacks authenticity.>

<The leaders must be challenged during the broadcast,> Sven opined. <It won’t be pretty, but we’ve the hydroponic specialists to spell out the danger.>

The contentious conference ended for a meal. Afterward, the three planetary Thet were shown to their cabins.

With doors open, two meetings swiftly formed, the leaders in one and the hydroponic specialists in the other.

“Help me understand what’s going on?” Barger, a farm manager, pleaded. “The conclave offers a means of saving our population, and our leaders are oblivious to the problem. You’d think they were brain-dead.”

“It’s fear,” Operg, the director, replied.

“Fear of our citizens?” Zerfa inquired.

“Indirectly,” Operg returned. “Our leaders know if the population was to learn the truth, they would never be reelected. It’s not well-known, but they’ve earned a great many credits from dubious transactions.”

“Traitors,” Barger growled quietly.

“Couldn’t we use this during the broadcast?” Zerfa offered.

“Without the evidence, we would appear to be making accusations to support our arguments,” Operg pointed out.

As Operg had been a vocal advocate of change for the farming community, she was well respected. Therefore, Zerfa and Barger accepted her opinion.

“What’s to be our role in the broadcast?” Barger inquired nervously.

Operg’s growl was low and humorous. “Not to worry,” she replied. “We’re not in charge. The conclave didn’t go to all this effort to let three greedy Thet deter them. Listen carefully to the announcement. Follow the discussion and be prepared to respond with facts and solid reasoning.”

“Easy enough,” Zerfa remarked.

In another cabin, the conversation didn’t proceed as smoothly as that of the hydroponic specialists. SADE sensors weren’t required to hear the arguments down the length of the corridor.

However, the yelling came to an abrupt end when Merlie and Evelyn arrived to escort the Thet leaders to the bridge.

“Already?” Yucas inquired dubiously. “Notification of a planetwide announcement must be given ten cycles in advance.”

“Time is of the essence,” Evelyn replied, indicating the cabin’s open door.

Merlie couldn’t resist adding, “It was probably something in the announcement about the population’s impending starvation that had citizens hurrying to listen to our broadcast.”

Open Thet mouths greeted Merlie’s remark.

“This way,” Merlie said, also indicating the cabin’s exit.

The leaders joined the other planetary Thet on a procession along the corridor toward the bridge. As the group crossed the hatch, the farming specialists spotted Kios, and they nodded and smiled.

In contrast, the Thet leaders glowered at Kios, who stood with the Kega Orgeth.

Kios stepped forward and directed each trio to stand on either side of Mila and Peña. Then Orgeth stood next to the hydroponic management and Kios beside the leaders.

The defenders and the sisters were arrayed behind the first line occupied by Mila and Peña.

Throughout the first wave and aboard the *Storyteller*, SADEs and sisters had worked to link every major communication structure and provider to

the announcement. Then they'd sent the warning about a critical message from the planet's leaders and others.

Mila received a tiny countdown app from Salus. In turn, she linked to Peña, who would translate her thoughts for the broadcast. Another of her links connected to Dimitri, who would apprise her of the defenders' thoughts.

## My Books

*Worlds A Plenty* is the fifth novel in [Cercians](#), a series in the Earthers Saga that relates the stories of the descendants of Earth's colony ships.

The novel is available in e-book, softcover, and audiobook versions. Please visit my website, <https://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*

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*Dubious Risks*

*Fatal Flaws*

*Imperium's Demise*

**Cercians Series**

*Clash of Wills*

*Enemy at Bay*

*One of Three*

*Beyond the Gate*

*Worlds a Plenty*

*Spheres in Retreat (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 writers influenced my series, [The Silver Ships](#), [Pyreans](#), [Gate Ghosts](#), and [Cercians](#), which comprise the Earthers Saga. 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.

*These 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 spaceflight.*