

CLONE CRISIS
Gate Ghosts Book 2

S. H. JUCHA

Chapters 1 & 2 Excerpt

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

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

Glossary

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1: Second Guesses

NAIAD, GELUS SYSTEM

HOME PLANET

“I’ve had time to think,” Captain Johann Stegmeir said to Lieutenant Stacey Caballero.

The SADEs’ ship, *Alexander*, was looping through the Everett Wormhole. At its exit, the Quadrant would have a single transit to make the Gelus system and the local humans’ home world.

“You’re thinking about our investigation on Beta One,” Stacey replied. “I’ve been doing the same.”

Johann leaned his forearms on the cabin table. “We were isolated on Naiad for our entire careers. As for me, I was unprepared for what we found on the mining planets.”

“Expansive operations, weren’t they?” Stacey replied.

“None of our undercover agents dared send images to Naiad security, which I understood,” Johann continued. “The data accompanying the images would have given time and location stamps. If intercepted, the data would have exposed the agents.”

“Understood,” Stacey sympathized. “Their coded messages were brief, which left much to our imaginations about the worlds they inhabited. I envisioned rudimentary operations. Instead, the surface portions of the domes rival aspects of Naiad.”

“Which brings me to my point,” Johann said. “The companies have become wealthier than Naiad security knew. They’re certainly more economically independent than we were given to believe.”

“Where does this leave us?” Stacey inquired.

“I think we’ve just ignited a conflict,” Johann replied, briefly hanging his head.

“There’s something you’re not telling me,” Stacey said, regarding her captain steadily. “If it’s above my level, I’ll accept that.”

“It is, but I’m going to tell you anyway. You need to be prepared,” Johann explained. “The companies might not operate or keep their management on Naiad, but every chairperson and board director resides on the home world.”

Stacey knew this, and she waited for Johann to unburden his secret.

“You must protect this information, Lieutenant,” Johann warned. “It would mean our careers if the commandant found out that I’d shared it with you.”

Stacey nodded solemnly.

“The directors protect their companies by heavily influencing council and judicial members,” Johann said.

Stacey waited for Johann to say more. When he didn’t, she burst into laughter.

Johann’s surprise was transformed into a frown and then a scowl, as Stacey’s hearty laughter dwindled to an unconstrained chuckle.

“Lieutenant,” Johann finally reminded his subordinate.

“Sorry, Captain,” Stacey replied, waving her hand in an apologetic manner. “That’s not much of a secret. I think any Naiad citizen with half a brain has long suspected that. Our investigation has just proven the depth of that influence.”

“And an investigation is all we were supposed to have conducted,” Johann pointed out.

Stacey started to retort that they’d done just that, but her brain kicked into gear first. “The dead agent,” she said.

“That’s one,” Johann said quietly.

Stacey considered their investigatory steps from a negative point of view. “Our evidence consists of nine clone children. Could we be accused of kidnapping them?”

“It’s a possibility,” Johann replied. “The simplest rebuke might be that the removal of the children was beyond the scope of our investigation. On

another level, we could be guilty of removing corporate assets without a warrant.”

“How were we supposed to get a warrant to remove clone children we couldn’t identify?” Stacey shot back.

Johann raised his hands to ward off Stacey’s anger. “Regardless of an accusation’s lack of logic, it could be something an attorney charges. Any other thoughts?”

“No. Have you considered another weakness?” Stacey inquired.

“One,” Johann replied. “Our defense of Allie for the accidental killing of the agent.”

“You’ve stumped me on that one,” Stacey said. “They locked us in a metal alloy vault, with the intention of killing us.”

“Who says?” Johann asked.

“Cremysylon said —” Stacey began and then halted.

“Exactly,” Johann quickly replied, nodding his head at what had occurred to Stacey. “We’ve no proof of what the CEO intended. Think of what the defense will do with that.”

“We were overly aggressive and risked the lives of the X-Ore agents with the use of an alien cutting tool,” Stacey acknowledged.

“And we relied on the opinion of an alien entity as to what the CEO intended,” Johann added.

“That’s a far stretch,” Stacey objected.

“You’re going to say that people had to be there to realize our dire situation,” Johann riposted.

“We’ve the SADEs’ recordings,” Stacey pointed out.

“That’s true, but they’ll only be valuable to us if they’re allowed into evidence,” Johann said, dashing ice water on Stacey’s idea.

“Until now, I was feeling good about the success of our investigation,” Stacey said glumly.

“I’m just thinking of the events from a defense attorney’s viewpoint,” Johann offered. “A lot will depend on whom we draw as a prosecutor and who sits in judgment. But make no mistake about it. Our investigation has lit a conflagration.”

“We do have the evidence from Geneva,” Stacey added. Then she corrected her statement. “And it comes primarily from the SADEs’ observances of the events. Although we can serve as eyewitnesses, we didn’t collect any physical evidence.”

“There’s one more thing to consider,” Johann said. “If council or judicial members have been accepting support from the companies’ directors, then they can’t afford to be exposed. They’ll use every means available to them to derail the trials.”

A sobered Stacey stared at her captain. She hadn’t been so naïve as to think that the Naiad social elite hadn’t been corrupted by the companies, but she’d believed that when the truth was exposed, they’d have no choice but to keep their mouths shut. It hadn’t occurred to her that they’d try to disrupt the judicial process.

On the *Alexander’s* bridge, a similar conversation was taking place.

“Cremsylon, why couldn’t we have helped the inactives on Geneva?” Ceda asked pointedly.

Escher Talons and his sister, Allie, were taken aback by Ceda’s attitude. She stood close to the SADE and stared into his eyes.

<From inferior citizen to warrior in such a short amount of time,> Z commented privately to Miranda.

“For the dying, the medical nanites have nothing of value to imitate,” Cremsylon replied. He was collecting Ceda’s bio data through her implant, curious about the emotional changes he was witnessing.

“Explain,” Ceda said, borrowing a common SADE term.

“The nanites are programmed to use healthy cells as a template,” Cremsylon said. “Unfortunately, the inactives’ cells have reached apoptosis. They’re rapidly dying, making the nanites useless, which means nothing can be done to aid the patients.”

“With your technological expertise, you haven’t found a way around this problem?” Ceda continued.

“If we could have indefinitely extended the lives of biologicals, which ones should we have chosen to help, dear one?” Miranda asked. “All of them? The most deserving and by whose standards? Our favorites, only to be accused of selective breeding or some other such nonsense?”

Ceda held up her hands in resignation. “Consider me enlightened,” she said. She’d quickly realized that the subject’s ramifications were beyond her. More important, they weren’t germane to the issue she wanted to keep front and center.

Cremsylon noted that Ceda hadn’t retreated. “What else is on your mind, Ceda?” he asked.

“Explain to me the difference between our actions for the clones on Geneva versus Beta One,” Ceda said, accepting the offer to continue.

“You wish to know why we didn’t assist the Beta One employees and clone miners,” Kelley supposed.

“Precisely,” Ceda replied.

“We made an agreement with the Geneva director of operations,” Kelley replied. “We had no such arrangement with the Beta One authorities.”

“Why not do it anyway? You had the upper hand, having arrested some of the domes’ principals,” Ceda offered.

“Ceda,” Escher interrupted, “Cremsylon has explained the SADEs’ priorities. First and foremost, they’re here to prevent the sisters from subsuming our worlds. That requires Naiad’s help. We overstepped our bounds on Beta One. There will be repercussions.”

<Well stated, Escher,> Z sent privately.

“The companies have been caught breaking Naiad law. Surely, they’ll be forced to cease and desist from clone production,” Allie objected.

“Who’ll absorb the costs of those changes and over what timespan?” Kelley asked.

Allie and Ceda gazed confusedly at the SADEs. To them, a judgment against the companies ensured a swift end to the problem.

“I think it’s going to get messy,” Escher said quietly.

“Messy how, Escher?” Z queried.

“My father said something to me nearly six years ago in reply to my inquiry about a late payment for a Regolith Recovery piece of work,” Escher explained. “He said something cryptic like, ‘They’re having challenges.’ When I pressed him, he wouldn’t say more. Later, I learned that Pure Pour had tried a hostile takeover of Transit One.”

“We assume, dear one, that you aren’t intimating something involving the company’s finances,” Miranda said.

“I never learned the details, but something that involved the board of directors wouldn’t have interfered with my invoice payment,” Escher replied. “However, I know someone who probably would know what happened.”

Comprehending Escher’s hint, Cremsylon signaled Nalia. She’d just completed another round of surgical operations to remove Bethany McIntyre’s mod implants.

After covering the open wounds with nanites paste and surgical gauze, Nalia informed Bethany that she was requested on the bridge.

“This would be a lot easier with one of your implants,” Bethany grouched, as she hurriedly dressed.

“Assuredly,” Nalia replied. “I’m available whenever you wish.”

“Don’t tempt me,” Bethany said dismissively.

“There is no temptation on my part, Bethany,” Nalia replied in a stern voice, which brought the ex-security commander’s head up. “Our comm implants have their values, but the decision is entirely yours.”

“Apologies, Nalia, I’m still suffering from the hellacious transitions,” Bethany said, as she carefully closed her shirt over the bandages.

“Understandable, Bethany,” Nalia said, “but you should remember that you’re among friends who wish to help you. That might not be true on Naiad. Be prepared to don your mental armor against your superiors.”

The warning caught Bethany off guard. She tapped a quick note on her slate, reminding herself to ponder the idea later. Then she tipped her head to Nalia, exited the medical facilities, and strode swiftly toward the bridge.

“Thank you for joining us, Bethany,” Cremsylon said, as the ex-commander joined the group.

“How are the operations proceeding?” Ceda asked solicitously.

“I’m getting there. There are many of them, and some are deep, grafted to the bones,” Bethany replied, and Ceda winced.

Bethany laid a companionly hand on Ceda’s arm and laughed lightly. “It’s not as bad as it sounds. The SADEs’ medical procedures are amazingly pain-free.” Turning to Cremsylon, she said, “You called me.”

Cremsylon indicated Escher, who related the incident that he'd heard about at Transit One.

There was a moment of hesitation on Bethany's part. Her habit of segregating information prevented her from having frank discussions. Nalia's words came back to her. The SADE had reminded her that she was among friends.

"A commander is routinely kept apprised of incidents like the one between Pure Pour and Reg-Rec," Bethany explained.

"To allow you to make your own preparations," Z surmised.

"Yes," Bethany replied.

"Who did what?" Allie urged.

"There was talk of a new wormhole found connecting Kilmer and Transit One," Bethany said. "Although, that was never substantiated."

"That would have been extremely convenient for either company," Escher suggested.

"Agreed," Bethany said. "Apparently, Pure Pour moved first to take advantage of the opportunity. It employed third-party forces, who attempted to land on Transit One. The action was a disaster for the invaders."

"How so?" Cremsylon inquired.

"Details are scarce," Bethany replied. "My best guess is that Reg-Rec had someone on the inside of Pure Pour at Kilmer. That individual warned the company, and preparations were made to repel the attacking forces."

The *Alexander's* controller completed Cremsylon's query. "The controller has reviewed the extensive files that were obtained from Naiad," the SADE said. "There is scant mention of these third-party forces and little detail."

"Bethany, what is your rank in Naiad security?" Escher suddenly asked.

"Good question," Bethany replied. "After ten years undercover, I'm probably due for a promotion." Her laugh wasn't humorous. "I was fresh out of the academy when I was recruited for undercover work. Essentially, I was a rank agent."

"Do you have details about these forces for hire, Agent?" Z asked.

“Z, among this group, please call me Bethany. On Beta Two, I knew I could make a request of the director of operations to acquire outside support. Where the director would send that message I wouldn’t have known.”

“If they’re not frequently employed, how can they maintain their training, their mod upgrades?” Escher asked.

“This is my suspicion, not fact,” Bethany responded. “I think the companies might have these various forces on retainer.”

“How many groups, and where do they reside?” Kelley inquired.

“Unknown,” Bethany replied.

“What of armament?” Z asked.

“I saw some poor imagery of a failed takeover,” Bethany replied. “The troops looked like sentinels. Their armor and suits were combined, and they carried heavy packs. Various lines led from the packs to their hands.”

“What would you estimate were their weapons?” Miranda asked.

“Could have been gas,” Bethany replied, her hand going to her chin. She’d recently reclaimed her hands, and it felt strange to be able to touch her face without feeling metal. “Could have been stick too.”

“Stick?” Miranda queried.

“A liquid that when sprayed creates a net that entraps the target,” Bethany explained. “Tough to get off. Usually requires a reagent to break it down.”

“Then nothing heavy?” Z inquired.

“Unknown,” Bethany replied. “I’ve never had any direct contact with one of these independent forces. Could they be aggressive enough to bring lasers or explosive ordnance into the domes? It’s possible. With programmable magnetic boots, they could blow the top of the dome and remain stuck to the decking.”

“The introduction of this topic doesn’t bode well for the future,” Kelley mused.

“Agreed,” Cremsylon said. “If Naiad chooses to declare the companies guilty of breaking the law, then the organizations will be forewarned.”

“Then Naiad agents could be landing on mining planets protected by these third-party forces,” Bethany supplied.

“I would add one more possible means of deterrence,” Escher volunteered. “Sentinels could easily be programmed to admit no one through the shuttle ports’ security checkpoints. In that case, they might not be limited to capture and hold.”

“The companies can’t go that far,” Allie protested. “They’d be declaring themselves to be independent of Naiad. They’d become different nations.”

“Allie,” Ceda said gently. “The companies have depended on clones for decades. If Naiad rules that they’ve violated the law and must cease and desist, the home planet will be threatening a primary source of their profits.”

2: Council's Invitation

When the *Alexander* appeared below the Gelus ecliptic, the Naiad Council was alerted, and the presiding member, David Yewall, snatched his slate to arrange communications with the ship. It wasn't necessary. Before he could touch the screen, an alien face appeared.

"Greetings, Councilor Yewall," Cremsylon said. "Much has transpired since we left Naiad. It's our thought that it would behoove the council to board the *Alexander* and hear directly from the Naiad officers and us. This will allow you time to prepare for our landing and media broadcasts."

It was the mention of media that caught David's attention. It hinted at events transpiring that would unsettle Naiad's relationships with the corporations.

"I would be willing to visit your ship, Cremsylon," David replied. "I'll have to communicate with the other councilors and let you know our decision."

"We've taken the liberty of doing that for you, Councilor Yewall," Cremsylon replied. "The other four have agreed. Our invitation included Commandant van Dysen, and he's assented to join you. Does seven hours tomorrow morning suit you?"

"Tomorrow will be fine," David replied.

"We'll collect you from the shuttle port passenger area," Cremsylon said. Then he terminated the call.

Immediately, David connected to the other councilors, who began talking at once.

"One at a time, and I'm first," David shouted. With order restored, he said, "I take it that everyone has been contacted by individuals aboard the *Alexander*, and you consented to a visit, with pickup tomorrow at seven hours."

Everyone agreed to David's statements. Laura couldn't help adding, "Yes, one of the *aliens* did speak with me." She had a way of twisting a word to make it sound like a sour taste in her mouth.

"Was any mention made to you of a concern about media?" David ventured.

That created another rush of voices. The four councilors had heard that, but they wanted to know what it meant.

"I haven't a clue, but I don't like it," David replied to the quieted members.

"This is what I was warning the council about," Laura objected strenuously. "The *aliens* have probably disturbed our relationships with the rim worlds, and Naiad will pay for it."

"Laura, do you mean that our officers might have found corporate wrongdoing, and now we'll have to finally confront the companies?" Claudia Hoffing inquired sarcastically.

Laura's heated retort was best ignored by the other councilors.

"One last thing," David said. He was anxious to end the conference call and make preparations. "Commandant van Dysen will be traveling with us. I'll see you at seven hours."

Assistants cleared the councilors' agendas for the next two days.

Messages from the rim worlds had already reached the relevant board of directors, and company leaders had their heads together. By the time the *Alexander* made Naiad, directors were working to minimize the damage from the investigation and profit from the presence of the sisters.

By seven hours the next morning the councilors and the commandant were assembled. They watched a breathless comtech director, Diana Breneman, hurry to meet them.

"If you needed to call me, Diana, my slate still works," David remarked.

"Sorry for my late arrival. I'm joining you for the flight," Diana replied.

"Then you received an invitation too?" Ramiro Ferraro, a council member, inquired.

“No, I invited myself. The SADEs seem to be quite accommodating. So, I thought I’d take the opportunity to see how an advanced alien ship operates,” Diana replied.

David glanced at the others, and no one appeared to object. To his mind, the assembled personages were probably loath to voice any opinion on a minor matter that might annoy the aliens.

On time and disconcertingly to the second, the SADEs appeared from the freight elevator and approached David’s group.

None of these SADEs were familiar to the Naiad humans, but, like the others, they were exceedingly polite. The Naiads were escorted below, using the freight tunnel that branched to an engineering bay.

As Claudia Hoffing’s environment suit closed around her, she queried, “Does everyone’s suit fit as well as mine?”

“They would,” a female SADE replied.

“You have our measurements,” Claudia surmised.

“Assuredly,” the SADE replied.

“Beautiful eyes,” Claudia commented. “What’s your name?”

“Violet.”

“Appropriate,” Claudia remarked before her helmet and viewplate were closed by a signal from Violet.

As before, humans weren’t allowed to cross Naiad’s frozen, windswept surface without the support of the SADEs. Even burly Commandant van Dysen firmly gripped the SADE who held him.

Seated within the traveler, the Naiad passengers searched for harnesses and seat recliners.

“Calm yourselves, Sers,” Violet announced from the front of the aisle. “We’ve already launched from Naiad’s surface. When the cabin lights brighten, we’ll have landed in the *Alexander’s* bay.”

“Who’s your amazing pilot?” van Dysen inquired.

“We have none,” Violet replied. “The trip is elementary, and the controller has our request.”

“I knew there was a reason to make this trip,” Diana whispered to Claudia, who sat beside her.

“Not a vibration. Not a one,” Claudia replied in amazement.

Thoughts were shared by the Naiads in soft whispers to avoid being overheard, except for Laura, who kept her own counsel.

<They've met our kind,> Emory sent. <They've witnessed our capabilities. Yet, they fail to adapt their behaviors accordingly.>

The SADEs shared their humor about Emory's comments, while they listened to every word the Naiads said.

The cabin lights brightened, and the ship's passengers prepared to depart. Cremsylon and Kelley were there to greet them. Then the Naiads were guided to a meal room.

On the way upward, they were required to ride on two different lifts. As the first one rose, Diana nudged Claudia's arm. She indicated the lift's movement with her hands. Then she touched her ear and shook her head.

Claudia got the message. The lift didn't shudder, groan, creak, or indicate movement in any manner.

The Naiads walked into a meal room filled with individuals.

"Please take these seats," Cremsylon requested, indicating one side of an elongated table facing the assembled people.

Before the Naiad visitors could be seated, Laura spotted Escher and Ceda. "Those two," she said vehemently and pointing, "should be under arrest. Captain Stegmeir, are they in your custody?"

Cremsylon let Johann reply. He hoped to allow the Naiad officers as much room to operate as the guests allowed.

"Negative, Councilor Marolakos," Johann replied crisply. "You may have noticed that we're not on Naiad. This ship is the sovereign property of Z and Miranda." With a flick of his hand, he indicated the towering SADEs, who stood to the sides of the two facing groups of individuals. "Commandant van Dysen can verify that neither Lieutenant Caballero nor I have authority to act as officers of the court."

Before Laura could retort, Cremsylon announced in an authoritative voice, which imitated Alex Racine, "Kindly be seated, regardless of whether you have further objections."

Laura wasn't about to concede, but Miranda turned her torso and focused on the councilor, who took the hint and sat down.

Snickers were heard from several mickies.

“I think introductions are appropriate,” Kelley said, stepping to the center of the two groups. “My name is Kelley. My father was Mickey Brandon.”

Then Kelley named the councilors, the commandant, and the director. Then the SADE turned to the assembled individuals on the other side.

“You’re familiar with Captain Stegmeir and Lieutenant Caballero,” Kelley continued. “However, you might not know of ex-Commander Bethany McIntyre, who lately served on Beta Two.”

Van Dysen winced, as Bethany stood and nodded toward the individuals on the other side of Kelley.

“Why ex-commander, and why no uniform?” James asked.

“Until recently, Bethany McIntyre was a valuable undercover agent for Naiad security,” van Dysen said. It was obvious he wasn’t happy about the outing of Bethany in present company.

“Previously, my uniform consisted of massive modifications, which Nalia is removing for me,” Bethany replied, in answer to James’s question. “As for why I’m not on Beta Two and still undercover, the reason is that my identity was in danger of being compromised. The presence of the sisters exacerbated the company’s operations.”

“Who are the sisters?” David inquired.

“That will be covered later,” Bethany replied. “That you don’t know that term indicates how much information you’re lacking.” Then she sat down.

Before another question could be asked by the guests, Kelley said, “You’re familiar with Escher Talons and Ceda Geneva. Beside Escher is his sister, Allie Talons.”

Allie didn’t bother standing. Her defiant expression spoke of her opinion about the individuals who tried to arrest and charge her brother.

Kelley chuckled, a sound he’d often heard from his father, Mickey Brandon. “Obviously, our guests aren’t held in high regard by everyone.”

Turning and swinging an arm toward forty-one assembled individuals, Kelley said, “These are mickies, mining orphans, from whom the companies routinely withhold their cids.”

Eyeing Commandant van Dysen, Kelley added, "That, in and of itself, should be cause for Naiad to investigate mining practices."

When Jasper noticed that the councilors and the commandant hadn't batted an eye when the mickies were introduced, he was infuriated. Abruptly standing, he pointed a finger at the far table, and, in accusatory tones, he called out, "You've known about us, haven't you?"

The guilty expressions were obvious.

"I thought so!" Jasper declared.

Lita stood beside Jasper. "Do you have any idea what we went through to survive in the tunnels?" she asked rhetorically. "Of course, you don't."

Red wasn't missing out on the opportunity. "I'd love to see the bunch of you down below without cids, without accounts, and struggling to survive," he declared. "You wouldn't last the month."

Kelley waved gently, encouraging the mickies to sit. "The number of those disgruntled with your ways seems to have grown," he remarked to the guests. "Perhaps, when regarding the teenagers, your sympathies might not be fully engaged. Look behind them at the thirty-two children. They are also mickies. Some of the orphan gangs of Geneva gave up their youngest."

"You mean they weren't even given a choice," Laura shot back, meaning to undermine the SADE's statements.

In response, they heard Jasper's gang utter a single word in unison.

"If you haven't heard that word before," Escher said, "I can tell you that it's rather derogatory. Allie and I were once crats until we stopped being high-minded surface fools."

Laura was tempted to retort, but she saw Miranda wave a single finger in negation at her. The thought crossed her mind that on her return to Naiad she would make many of those in attendance pay for their insults and their crimes.

"This leaves one group to introduce," Kelley continued, addressing the guests. "Seated directly across from you are three young girls. In their laps and playing with toys are three five-year-olds. Standing directly behind them are three SADEs caring for three infants. These nine children are clones."

At the mention of their statuses, the three nannies set their charges on the table, rose, and tipped their heads to the guests. Then they quickly resumed their seats and recovered the children.

“You’ll find they have the same cid,” Ceda said. “It’s a clone cid issued on Beta One by X-Ore, the creator of the clones.” She stared evenly at the councilors. “Hard to ignore the evidence, isn’t it?”

“I suppose these children were taken without permission too,” Laura fired back.

Claudia had had enough of Laura’s attitude. “Kelley, with all of your technical expertise, have you invented a cure for stupidity?”

“Councilors,” David admonished. “We’re here to learn. This is not a time for comments, deliberations, or arguments. Kelley, is that all the individuals to be presented to us?”

“There are three more, but we deemed them unsatisfactory for present company,” Kelley replied, indicating the clone children. From his hand, sprang a holo-vid image containing the faces of the three captives. “You’re looking at X-Ore personnel from Beta One. I won’t be detailing the reasons why they’re aboard this ship. That’s the job of your Naiad officers. I’ll simply introduce them as CEO Connor Metcalf, Commander Mathew Colbrum, and Director Melondy Phillips.”

“Are we to understand that these individuals are being detained?” van Dysen asked.

Kelley turned toward Johann and Stacey.

“They are,” Johann said, rising. “Initially, they would have been charged with the crimes of manufacturing and selling clones. During the course of our investigation, the CEO and the commandant imprisoned us. With the help of the SADEs and the Talons sibling, we managed to escape. When the X-Ore agents were defeated, these individuals were arrested. My full report is ready for your review, Commandant.”

Van Dysen was stunned by the revelations. If he thought the investigation would have ended in such a manner, he wouldn’t have agreed to its authorization. He saw the possibility of his career swiftly ending.

“Is this the extent of your presentation?” David asked, eyeing Cremsylon.

Cremsylon rose and came to stand beside Kelley. "These are the individuals we thought you should have an opportunity to meet before announcements were made."

"What announcements?" Ricardo asked.

"Are you assuming that everything you've heard this morning must not be shared with the Naiad populace?" Cremsylon asked.

"We prefer to handle these types of sensitive issues in private," Ricardo replied.

"We bet you do," Bibi retorted. "You wouldn't want these dirty little secrets to become known to Naiad citizens. They might start to wonder what kind of people run their world."

"I've seen and heard enough," Laura declared. "I'm ready to return planetside."

"I'm not," Claudia announced. "I want to talk to some of these people."

"Me too," James added.

"I think it would be best to spend the day up here," David said, which made the majority decision to remain aboard.

"Perhaps, we can excuse the teenagers and children and have a discussion with the remaining individuals about conditions at Beta Two," van Dysen offered, which the other guests readily accepted.

My Books

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

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

The Silver Ships Series

The Silver Ships

Libre

Méridien

Haraken

Sol

Espero

Allora

Celus-5

Omnia

Vinium

Nua'll

Artifice

Sojourn

Alliance

SADEs

Earthers

Talus

Elvians

Q-Gates

Conclave

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche

Veklocks

Gate Ghosts Series

Axis Crossing

Clone Crisis

Race Rivalry (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 series, [The Silver Ships](#), [Pyreans](#), and [Gate Ghosts](#). I crafted my stories to give readers intimate views of my characters, who wrestle with the challenges of living in space and inhabiting alien worlds.

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

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

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

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

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

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