

Q-GATES
A Silver Ships Novel

S. H. JUCHA



Chapters 1 & 2-Excerpt

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

Glossary

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1: Hidden Access

<Nothing,> Luther, the SADE, reported. <We've finished testing every surface of the corridor and dorm rooms on the second level.>

Mickey Brandon was tempted to swear, but as the premier Omnian engineer, he was more patient than most. Discoveries were often a matter of persistence.

<Maybe, we need to think about this differently,> Jess Cinders, the outpost's commander, sent. He and others were in the central hub of Outpost One: Resistance, a massive station located in the Pyrean system. The station served as the hub for peacekeeping forces within alliance space and was situated near Pyre's third moon, Triton.

<Explain, Commander,> Miriam requested. Like Luther, she was a SADE, and both of them were Mickey Brandon's engineering assistants. For the dome investigations, Luther was in the field, while Miriam remained with Mickey.

<We've been working on the assumption that a Q-gate's power supply must be located below the dome,> Jess sent.

<There is no other place where the power could be located,> Luther reasoned.

<Continue with your thought, Commander,> Mickey entreated. He was well aware that Jess and his twin, Kasie Cinders, as Pyreans, had the most extensive experience and knowledge of the Messinant Q-gates.

<I'm not arguing with the assumption, Luther,> Jess apologized. <What I'm trying to say is that this reasoning leads us to search a dome's lower levels for the access.>

<There is the possibility that the Messinants never provided a way to reach the power plants,> Lucia Bellardo, the outpost's fleet admiral offered. <They could have sealed it underneath the dome's entire construct.>

<Your pardon, Admiral, that's not logical,> Mickey reasoned. <More than the power supply must be located below the dome. We haven't found any facilities sources ... water supply and treatment, pallet cleaning, meal utensil recycling, and the wonderful paste supply.>

The laughter of Jess, Lydia, and Kasie echoed around the central hub.

<In time, Mickey, you get used to the paste,> Lydia sent, chuckling.

Mickey shuddered. He'd tried dining on the dome's offerings of multiple pastes for two Pyrean cycles. Afterward, he left the on-site investigation of the Q-gates to the SADEs. Then he'd returned to the outpost and relished the recipes served by Méridien food dispensers.

<Commander, please return to your musings,> Mickey urged.

<The SADEs record the glyphs that adorn every surface of the domes they visit,> Jess continued. <Many are decorative, and the rest are instructive. None of them point the way to the access that we're seeking. I'm beginning to think that we should take Kasie's advice.>

Kasie stared at her twin in confusion. <I don't know the way,> she objected. She kept her sendings brief, having adopted her implant recently.

SADEs had solved the issues of empaths receiving the tiny comm device. They coated the device to prevent interference from an empath's sending, and they shifted the comm frequencies so as not to interfere with an empath's power.

<Enlighten us, Commander,> Mickey requested.

<Kasie has often quoted the original explorers, our ancestors, Captain Cinders and Envoy Harbour,> Jess explained. <They intimated that the Messinants had a perverse sense of humor. Hiding the instructional glyphs among the decorative ones is an indication of their strange methods.>

<This leads you where, Commander?> Luther asked.

<What would be the places in the dome that we would never suspect?> Jess asked rhetorically. <The SADEs inspected every centimeter of the lower two levels. The deck wasn't investigated except to study the glyphs.>

<The commander has an excellent point,> Miriam acknowledged. <It's illogical that you would locate an entry to the deepest reaches of a structure from the uppermost level.>

<Which fits with some of the oddities of the Messinants,> Kasie pointed out. She grasped Jess's head and planted a kiss on his cheek.

<If we follow the commander's concept,> Luther sent, <Then we should suspect every structure of the deck ... the platform gates and the console.>

<We might consider that the Messinants took care to protect the entry,> Kasie proposed. <Think in terms of requiring two or three steps to trigger the opening.>

<We've searched the platform before we descended below main deck,> Luther sent. <The ring and surface of each platform is a continuous metal surface.>

<That leaves the console,> Jess sent. <If there is access to the dome's power plant and facilities support, then it must possess the key.>

<We believe that we've discovered every submenu and explored each function,> Miriam sent. <There's nothing in the console's deeper layers that helps us.>

<Which isn't where the Messinants would put it,> Kasie interjected hotly, and she quickly curtailed her power before she inundated the humans near her with her frustration. As a powerful empath, she had the ability to read and transmit emotions to sentient beings.

The SADEs communed. Logic had failed to find the all-important access to the dome's inner workings. Human interpretations of the nature of an ancient and long-gone species, who built the gates, had been ignored. An error in judgment had been made.

<Would Julien have counseled us differently?> Luther asked Miriam privately.

<Perhaps,> Miriam replied. <We've an opportunity to learn from our mistake and improve the balance between our decision processes and biological intuitions.>

<Kasie, our apologies for not listening to you earlier,> Luther sent. <We would hear your reasoning now.>

Mickey kept a hand over his mouth, while he eyed the audience in the central hub. He'd heard Kasie's protestations when the SADEs had made a cursory investigation of the upper deck before they made their way below.

However, he'd tasked Luther with commanding the dome's search. In that regard, he had to let the SADE lead.

That Luther had come up empty-handed and was willing to consider an entirely different approach, a human's intuition of all things, bode well for his development.

<The access would be similar to the basic commands that Aurelia Garmenti, the dome's premier investigator discovered on the console,> Kasie sent. <It would be something so elemental that our eyes would skip over it. We'd consider it nonfunctional.>

While Kasie had been speaking, Luther had led the SADEs from the lowest level. They trekked up the ramp, down the first level corridor, up the next ramp, and onto the deck.

<Kasie, continue to muse on this subject,> Luther requested, as the SADEs fanned out across the deck to regard the single platform and console from different perspectives.

<In some regards, the Messinants have proven to be unfathomable,> Jess interjected. <Let's remember that critical console actions required simultaneous inputs into two different panels. We know from the images of the Messinants contained within consoles that one individual of their race couldn't have reached both panels. Therefore, it took two individuals to trigger those menu items. We consider those requirements some sort of safeguards.>

<If the Messinants would do that for an important menu item,>Kasie interjected, <what would they do to hide access to the dome's power supply and the facilities services?>

Tacnock, a Jatouche, had remained quiet during the conversation, except for an occasional slurp on his Pyrean fruit juice. When a noisy suck on the straw heralded the drink's bottom, he joined the discussion.

<I would echo what Jess and Kasie are saying,> Tacnock sent. <It's supposed by the alliance races that the Messinants were an ancient race who existed for countless millennia before they disappeared from this area of space. A theory suggests that they didn't originate from here but treated alliance space as their enormous laboratory for genetic experiments. They'd have carefully thought through the processes by which a race discovers a

dome, gains access to the deck and the console, learns the console's basic functions, and integrates with other races via the gates. Each step is a test, which the sentient species must pass. This challenge is no different.>

Kasie laid a hand on Tacnock's furry shoulder and shared her appreciation with him.

Tacnock closed his eyes and relished the pleasant feeling that swept through his mind. It was in sharp contrast to the anxiety that had ruled his emotions during the latest assignment.

A close friend of Jess and Kasie, Tacnock commanded one of the outpost's carrier attack teams. The carriers were tasked with freeing planets and domes from the Colony, the race of ravenous sentient insectoids that had inundated alliance space via the domes.

The alliance races had contributed funds, materials, and specialists to construct Outpost One, and Alex Racine had used Omnia Ships reserves of licensing fees with Sol to purchase four armed transport carriers designed by the SADEs.

After months in the field, a carrier rotated back to the outpost for relief, and Tacnock, who led two hundred of the cat-like Sylian troops against insectoid-held domes and planets, was enjoying downtime.

The other three attack commanders were Queen Homsaff, a Dischnya; Major Aputi Tulafono, a Pyrean; and Commander Sastisona, a Sylian.

Each commander's tasks grew ever riskier. The Colony was quick to learn the outpost troops' techniques and devise tactics to defeat them.

Jess, Lucia, and Kasie had concluded that the Colony had found a way to message through the consoles and warn every other dome held by the insectoids of the rebellion's newest offensive techniques.

In the dome being investigated, the SADEs briefly communed, and Luther presented their opinion.

<Kasie, we would like to invite you to participate in the search,> Luther requested.

<On-site?> Kasie inquired.

<It would be the optimal method,> Luther replied.

Kasie's power slipped free, and the central hub's humans were inundated by fierce jubilation.

Before Jess could remind his sister, the audience heard Kasie mutter, “Oops.”

The SADEs recorded the energy release from Kasie’s mind. The unusual capability of the empath’s biological minds fascinated them.

<We look forward to you joining us, Kasie,> Luther sent, having been informed of the nature of Kasie’s empathetic response.

“Yum, paste,” Mickey muttered to no one.

<The commander would be as valuable to have on-site too,> Kasie sent. <He’s as good at deciphering the Messinant intentions as me.>

No! Lucia thought vehemently. She held herself still. Jess and she had risked their lives innumerable times combating the insectoids’ deadly reds and grays. They’d led their troops from the front and had managed to survive despite the odds and the losses.

Having resisted the advances of other men for decades, Lucia Bellardo had fallen in love with the only man who’d found a way to her heart — Jess Cinders.

<I don’t think that’s a good idea,> Mickey sent. <We’ve no idea of what measures the Messinants have employed to protect a dome’s inner workings. I’m trying to minimize the investigative team. On that note, Kasie, tell the SADEs of your ideas, but don’t execute them yourself. Am I understood?>

<I understand, Mickey,> Kasie sent, having been reminded of the dangers of meddling in the creations of the Messinants.

Belatedly, Mickey remembered his place within the outpost’s hierarchy. <Of course, Commander, that’s my suggestion.>

<Sensible, Mickey, even though it’s not my preference to risk my sister,> Jess sent. <However, we’re not making any progress with the present methods. No disrespect intended, Luther.>

<None taken, Commander,> Luther replied. <When SADEs haven’t succeeded in an investigation, it’s obvious to us that a different approach must be taken and welcomed.>

Jess turned to Kasie, but she’d already left the hub. His implant located her heading for her cabin to pack.

Sam’s going to be unhappy, Jess thought.

Sam Fleetfoot, an Omnian security lieutenant of New Terra origin, had been hired and promoted to major by Jess to head outpost security. Kasie and he had often enjoyed their downtime together on Pyre.

Originally, the nearby planet was home to a fierce race who had gone to war with the Jatouche via Pyre's single dome connection.

The Jatouche had retaliated and their weapons had ignited the planet's surface, resulting in an atmosphere occluded by dangerous quantities of ash and noxious gases. Feeling guilty about the planet's catastrophic state, the Jatouche had worked with Pyreans, the new colonists from Earth, to restore the planet.

It was nearly a century before the planet was habitable. Then, during the next two centuries, the surface had gained its present green state.

Lucia also took note of Kasie's quick exit. She tasked a traveler to transport Kasie to Triton, the third moon outward from Pyre, where the system's dome was located. Then she sent a link to Kasie.

Kasie intended to use the dome network to reach the site of the SADE investigation. Her pilot launched from the outpost, made the short trip to Triton, and landed within a surface bay that Mickey's teams had built.

Traveling through a tunnel, descending via a lift, and traversing more tunnels, Kasie passed through the dome's entry point, crossed the lower level corridor, ascended a ramp, and arrived on the gate's deck.

There was no need for Kasie to communicate her destination. Triton's dome had a single platform, which connected Pyre and Na-Tikkook, the Jatouche home world.

Kasie stepped onto the platform and nodded at the console operator.

A tap on a console panel sent blue light emanating from the platform to merge with the dome's hemispheric projection, and Kasie disappeared.

Arriving within the Jatouche dome, which was located on Rissness, Kasie threaded slowly through the Jatouche, who were anxious to pay their respects. Not only was she recognized as a premier interpreter of bizarre console mysteries, but she was a descendant of the venerated explorers, Envoy Harbour and Advisor Cinders.

Selecting the next platform, the dome administrator halted journeyers to allow Kasie to ascend next. Then the console operator sent her on her way.

Kasie's trip through the domes to reach the investigation site shouldn't have been that far, as the distance between systems went. Jess and Mickey had chosen a system nearby to Pyre's star, Crimsa. It was unoccupied by a sentient race, including the Colony.

However, Kasie's route was roundabout. Messinants didn't build the gates to connect between the nearest systems. The domes appeared to have been constructed around the interests of the Messinants to see how their genetically tinkered races integrated after achieving spaceflight.

The route could have been shorter using the quickest gate links, except for one issue. There were some dome locations that had to be avoided. The insectoids held those.

Some domes were unoccupied. When Kasie arrived in these locations, she hurried to the console, set a panel for remote firing, climbed onto the next platform, and journeyed to the next destination.

At the final dome, Luther welcomed Kasie. "We look forward to your inspiration, Kasie," he said.

"No promises, Luther," Kasie replied. "I apologize for the fuss I made. I hated being left out of the opportunity to discover one of the last great secrets of the domes."

"Your emotional involvement with these creations is evident," a SADE replied. "It gives you an advantage that we don't possess."

The SADEs nodded in agreement, which made Kasie feel better about pushing her way into the SADEs' work. She gazed around at the equipment that littered the deck. Based on the possibility of her intuition succeeding, they'd brought every device from below deck — corridors, dorm rooms, and tunnels.

Kasie turned slowly toward the enigma that had frustrated everyone, the dome console.

"Kasie," Luther said, "it's twenty-five hours outpost time, which runs on the Pyrean chronometer."

“Oh,” Kasie replied. She checked her implant’s chronometer and realized that she’d spent much of the day journeying. While she stood uncertain about what to do next, her body answered the question. A wide yawn escaped.

Excusing herself, Kasie made for the ramp and sought out a dorm room. After the refresher and a change of clothes, she grabbed a plate of paste.

Yum, she thought sarcastically, as she stuck the first bite in her mouth and shuddered. Despite her tease of Mickey, she was entirely sympathetic to him.

After recycling her cup and plate, Kasie triggered a pallet from the wall, lay down, and was quickly asleep. She dreamed of the console, the panels, and myriad Messinant symbols.

2: Sixty Degrees

When Kasie's implant chronometer signaled, she woke. With a yawn and a stretch, she stood and tapped a glyph on the wall. The pallet slid into the wall to be cleaned. Then she made her way to the facilities. Afterward, she choked down paste and water and made her way to the upper deck.

Kasie smiled at the subtle movements the SADEs made as she gained the ramp's top. The first time she'd asked Juliette why that was their habit, the SADE had demonstrated the options.

Juliette had locked her avatar and frozen all facial movements. She'd held that position until Kasie noticeably shivered.

"Eerie?" Juliette had inquired, resuming human imitation.

"And then some," Kasie had replied.

"Julien has taught many of us the necessity of making biologicals comfortable with our unusual nature," Juliette explained. "The energy expenditure is minimal, and the returns are invaluable."

Kasie approached the console, and her vivid dreams returned. Staring at the complex Messinant device, she mused, "Why are the consoles the same build ... a primary panel and six operator panels?"

"We presume that's a rhetorical question, Kasie," Luther replied, approaching Kasie.

"I would mark it as that of an efficient manufacturing process," a SADE added. "The configuration would allow for a dome's future platform expansion without retrofit of the console."

"Exactly," Kasie said, turning around to face the SADEs arrayed around her. "We accept that the Messinants are or were marvelous engineers. Therefore, they would have built the domes with a care to easily add platforms as they tinkered with new races."

Luther activated a holo-vid that rested on the deck. Its power supply drove an image that rose high into the air. The SADEs supplied their memories of platform decks, and Luther overlaid them.

Kasie's head cocked to the side. She reached into the holo-vid and rotated elements of the display. She wasn't adept at this, but Luther moved the images to imitate her actions.

The overlay proved confusing to Kasie. It delivered too much information. <Jess, Mickey, help me,> she sent.

Luther completed Kasie's request, linking through the comm relays within the dome to reach the traveler that floated above the shuttle launch tunnel. The traveler connected to the Trident stationed in space, which maintained a link with the outpost.

<What do you need, Kasie?> Jess sent.

<Help me with orientation,> Kasie sent.

Mickey frowned, as he eyed Jess. His preference was to work with engineers, humans and SADEs, or leaders who were capable of clearer communications.

On the other hand, Jess understood his sister. She wasn't a detailed person, but she was amazingly intuitive. <What order of orientation would you like?> he sent.

Kasie smiled. It was like Jess to figure out her poorly worded request. <Platform expansion,> she sent.

<Luther, display only domes with one or two platforms,> Jess sent. <We need to determine orientation of the ramps and the consoles to the platforms.>

The SADEs comprehended Kasie's line of inquiry, which elevated their emotional algorithms.

<Identical,> Luther sent. <The positions of single platforms, of which there are only a few examples, are in the exact same locations on the decks.>

<And when you compare the decks with twin platforms?> Mickey asked, catching on to the investigation.

The display shifted, and Luther replied, <Every dome with two platforms shows a gate in the same position as the domes with a single gate.

The second platforms are shifted sixty degrees in a spinward direction. This would be observed by standing at the console, facing the first platforms, and raising your right arm.>

<Clockwise,> Jess interjected.

Mickey sent an image to the SADEs of an ancient clock recording the passage of time by circulating hands on a marked face.

<Yes, clockwise, Commander,> Luther acknowledged.

<Luther, analyze successive platform additions,> Miriam requested.

Kasie hoped to see the display change, but it never did. She made a face at being left out of the calculations.

<The process is carefully and uniformly established,> Luther concluded. <The third platform is added in the opposite direction from the first installation.>

<Counterclockwise,> Jess added, and the SADEs added the new term to their vocabulary.

<Then further additions would have continued in the same manner,> Mickey suggested. <Number four, clockwise by sixty degrees more; number five, by sixty degrees counterclockwise; and then the sixth gate in the final position.>

<You're correct, Mickey,> Luther sent.

<Kasie, how does this help you?> Jess sent.

<I don't know yet,> Kasie sent. <I wanted the answer to my question to help me understand the methods by which a dome is constructed and enlarged.>

<The analysis does demonstrate highly sophisticated engineering approaches,> Mickey commented. <You're standing in a dome with a single gate. I would suggest you investigate the deck area that corresponds to the next gate's installation.>

<You would think,> Kasie replied, chuckling, and Mickey frowned again at Jess, who raised a hand to indicate patience.

<Sorry, Mickey,> Kasie hastily added. <The Messinants aren't going to make it that easy. I think the ancient race viewed the burgeoning races who they'd manipulated as laboratory cultures, not sentient races who should be treated as equals.>

Jess understood what Kasie was trying to say, and he added, <In other words, it won't be obvious how the platforms are added or how the gates are linked. We're going to have to work at it.>

<It doesn't mean that we'll have to work at the construction,> Kasie sent. <The Messinants would have made that convenient for themselves. The challenge will be to discover the method. After we implement a platform installation, then it will really get complex.>

<How to link two gates?> Mickey assumed.

<That's one hurdle,> Lucia interjected. <After we're successful, it will be a question of which alliance members get access to which gates.>

Lucia's point halted conversation. The focus had been on the immediate technical problems, but the future presented entirely new political challenges.

Jess reviewed imagery stored aboard the outpost's data banks, and he sent one to every individual on the call.

<That's the Hyronzy dome,> Kasie sent, recognizing the burly, dark-brown furred operators at the console.

<With five platforms,> Mickey commented, recognizing what Jess was pointing out.

<Where do we think the Tsargit would like to connect the final gate?> Jess inquired.

<Or where would we like the Tsargit to connect?> Tacnock offered.

<I like Tacnock's attitude,> Kasie interjected.

<This might have to be something that Alex decides,> Mickey sent.

<The Hyronzy dome has one gate opening left, Mickey,> Jess sent. <I can tell you that the Tsargit won't want to connect to a gate outside of alliance space. That means the decision must be made in cooperation with the Tsargit, the Hyronzy, and another alliance race.>

<Understood, Commander,> Mickey sent, realizing he'd spoken out of turn on the subject.

The conference call audience received an image from Tacnock, which caught many by surprise. It was an image of the Triton dome deck, and it was heavily annotated. Five platforms had been added to the dome's single gate. Text accompanying the image read Hyronzy, Sol, and Omnia.

<Where should the other two gates lead?> Kasie asked, excited by the prospects.

<Where would you like to journey?> Tacnock replied, with a satisfied air.

<Perhaps we should focus on the immediate problem,> Jess suggested, knowing that his sister needed to be brought back to the here and now.

Frowning at Jess's practical advice, Kasie nonetheless turned her attention to the console. The single gate was controlled by the console's far left panel. At least, humans and alliance races had that in common with the Messinants — gate controls worked from left to right. Menus within the panels read down, and glyphs read left to right.

The second panel from the left was dark. It would light with a touch and would offer the primary menu. However, none of the menu items would activate.

Kasie considered addressing the centrally located primary panel and its powerful submenus to activate the second gate panel, but she dismissed the idea. *We need access to a deck's sublevel*, she thought. *The machinations necessary to install a second platform should activate the panel.*

When Kasie reached for the primary panel, she heard, <Kasie,> in her implant. Reluctantly, she pulled her hand back.

<Jess, I can't work through the SADEs,> Kasie objected. <I'm following patterns in my mind. If I stop and start to communicate my requests to the SADEs, I'll lose the flow.>

<We concur, Commander,> Luther sent. <We've invited Kasie here for her talent, and it must not be restricted.>

<Mickey?> Jess asked privately.

<I've no objection ... just trepidations,> Mickey replied.

<That makes two us,> Jess agreed. <Proceed, Kasie,> he sent.

Kasie stretched her arms to see how well her reach encompassed the primary and the secondary panels. The reach was sufficient, but her simultaneous view of both panels was restricted.

<Luther, I'll guide you on the second panel,> Kasie sent, as she recorded an image of that panel and shared it with the SADE. <I'll mark your panel with touchpoints. They might be single or multiple.>

<Understood, Kasie,> Luther replied, taking up a position in front of the secondary panel.

Keep it simple, obvious, Kasie encouraged herself. She perused the primary panel, pretending to see it for the first time. She also tried to think like an engineer, who would be routinely adding another gate.

Then Kasie touched the primary panel in an unmarked location and signaled Luther to do the same. The result was no action. Kasie continued to try combination movements until Luther suggested she take a break. She shrugged, exited the deck, ate some paste, visited the facilities, and lay down for a nap.

A few hours later, Kasie was back at the console. She admitted that working with Luther was easy. The SADE often correctly calculated what she wanted, and his reactions were swift.

Two cycles passed, while Kasie attacked the console panels with every combination she could imagine. Only Kasie, Luther, and other SADEs were linked. If anyone wanted to know about their progress, they connected to Miriam.

Kasie had long ventured past the concept of dual entry to activate the second panel in tandem with the primary panel. Now, she was attempting to use both panels to activate a new window in the primary panel, which would require an input.

“You’re hiding from me, but I know you’re there,” Kasie whispered to the console. Frustrated, she turned to stare at Luther.

Suddenly, an idea occurred to Kasie. “Could it be that easy?” she asked.

Luther recognized a rhetorical question and remained silent.

“Luther, I need a human,” Kasie said excitedly, “and I need them here now and for a while.”

Luther relayed the request to Miriam, Mickey, and Jess.

The SADEs in the dome perceived Kasie’s inspiration. A biological and a digital entity were trying to activate the second dome. It might be the attempt didn’t fall within the range of acceptability for the Messinants.

<I’ll go,> Edmas volunteered. As an Omnian senior engineer, his work responsibilities had fallen off with the completions of the outpost station

and the Triton's external dome, which managed traveler transport for the Messinant dome.

<Good choice,> Jess sent privately to Mickey.

<No objections here,> Mickey replied.

Edmas said a quick goodbye to Jodlyne, his partner, and hurried to catch the scheduled transport from the outpost to Triton. Riding the lift to the lower decks, he received a link from Miriam. It gave him a dome-by-dome path of the gates and instructions for remote console operation to reach Kasie.

It was late when Edmas arrived at the final dome.

"Welcome, Edmas," Luther said. "Kasie has retired. It's her habit to rest for a few hours and then return to work. You might want to take an opportunity to get some paste and refresh yourself."

"Paste ... can't wait," Edmas replied, chuckling. Then he headed below in the company of a SADE, who pointed out an available dorm room. Edmas memorized the glowing glyph that marked his door. As an engineer, he was always amazed by the near-perfect seal that hid the doors.

Taking time to eat and rest, Edmas set his implant's chronometer for the hour and a half that Luther estimated would return Kasie to the deck. The SADE was accurate. Edmas stood by the console only a few minutes before Kasie made her way up the ramp.

Kasie grinned and shook her head when she spotted Edmas.

"What?" Edmas asked, spreading his arms. "I won't do?"

"You'll do fine, pretty Earther man," Kasie replied. "I'd expected a security type ... maybe a New Terran, who would argue with every directive I gave."

"Engineers ... we aim to please," Edmas replied, sharing a broad grin with Kasie.

"You're familiar with what I've been doing?" Kasie asked, as she approached the console.

"Yes," Edmas replied. "You lead and direct me to follow the image you send."

Turning to Luther, Kasie said, "I'd like to recreate the entire period of trials, eliminating duplicate attempts."

“Understood, Kasie,” Luther replied. “Would you like them in any order?”

Kasie thought about Luther’s request. “Yes,” she replied. “I want to begin with my later attempts to get the primary panel to respond with some kind of input request.”

Luther nodded and linked with Kasie and Edmas. Then he fed Kasie’s routine to the two humans.

What had first taken Kasie a full cycle to work through was compressed to little more than a few hours, as Edmas and Kasie touched off the panels in accordance with the SADE’s images.

Afterward, Kasie and Edmas took a short break to eat.

Edmas thought to engage Kasie in some conversation about the Messinants, but she ate mechanically, her eyes staring far away. When she finished, she recycled her dishes and headed to the deck.

The routine continued. Luther sent the actions, and the humans followed them.

Edmas found the process mind-numbing, and his attention started to drift. He nearly missed what happened on his panel.

“Wow,” Edmas uttered. His hand froze above the panel before he’d responded to the SADE’s next operation.

“What?” Kasie demanded, stepping over to examine the panel in front of Edmas.

Luther immediately linked to the outpost’s senior staff.

Kasie and Edmas stared at a window that had popped up.

“What should I do?” Edmas asked.

“What’s your instinct?” Kasie returned, which the SADEs found a fascinating response.

“This doesn’t look like a normal window that’s seeking glyph input. It’s too large. It covers nearly the entire panel,” Edmas replied.

“So, what do you think you should do?” Kasie pressed.

While they were talking, the popup window disappeared. Kasie returned to the primary panel and repeated her last input. Then Edmas followed suit, and the window reappeared.

Operating as Kasie had urged, Edmas placed his hand palm down in the middle of the window.

“Yes!” Kasie said excitedly, when the panel accepted Edmas’ input. She glanced at the primary panel, which now had the same type of window. Without a thought, Kasie placed her hand in the new window.

“Step back,” Luther instructed the humans. He and the other SADEs had detected subtle vibrations in the deck.

As Kasie and Edmas stepped away from the console, it lifted a few centimeters and slid backward, taking the power supply and data lines with it.

Kasie clapped her hands and threw her arms around Edmas’ neck, delivering a fierce hug. Then she disengaged and made to inspect the opening, but Luther stood in the way. She had to be satisfied with the view that Luther sent her.

“Steps,” Edmas commented, sharing Luther’s view.

The SADEs picked up equipment. With Luther leading the way, they descended. Two SADEs remained on deck.

Edmas caught Kasie’s attention and glanced toward the two SADEs, who stood beside the open hole.

<Our protectors,> Kasie replied privately to Edmas. <They’re preventing us from following Luther, until he gives the okay that it’s safe. Also, if Luther signals trouble, then be prepared to be swept out of the dome over the shoulder of one of these individuals.>

My Books

Elvians is the twenty-third 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

Conclave (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 authors 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 spaceflight.