

SADES
A Silver Ships Novel

S. H. JUCHA



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

Glossary

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1: Adversary

Two travelers spun and looped through an asteroid field in a desperate effort to target and vanquish the other.

Lieutenant Neffess seized an opportunity to cut between two massive chunks of rocks, each one hundreds of times the mass of her ship.

In the course of time, as in millennia, the asteroids would merge under their mutual gravitational forces, as they circled the distant star.

The moment Neffess knew her pursuer lost her ship on telemetry, she looped in a port turn around one rock, taking a vector that angled below the ecliptic. Before she circled half the body's circumference, she signaled the controller via her implant to reverse course and swing overtop of the asteroid. She hoped to catch her adversary unaware. She waited, but the other traveler never appeared.

Immediately, Neffess shifted position. She orbited her asteroid to take up station below its base, as determined by the ecliptic. Her adversary was clever and had obviously anticipated her maneuvers. Choosing a random series of trajectory changes had only temporarily shaken the attacker off her trail.

Now, pursued and pursuer were blind to each other and waited for the first one to make a mistake.

Neffess reviewed her telemetry. The massive asteroids had cleared the area around them, as they orbited the star. They'd accreted the nearby dust, rocks, and ice. That limited her choices. If she ran for another rock cluster, she'd traverse open space, which would give her adversary an opportunity to target her stern.

Around the far side of the other asteroid, Lieutenant Nata sat tense in her traveler's pilot seat. Her ploy hadn't worked. She'd depended on Neffess, who favored starboard turns when pursued, to execute the same

maneuver when she passed between the rocks. This time Neffess had changed tactics, which meant Nata wouldn't be surprising her.

Each lieutenant knew the other waited beyond the opposite hunk of rocky body. In their heads-up displays, they watched chronometers count down. The engagement time limit was one hour.

The naval exercises were an annual contest between newly graduated lieutenants. It was both an exhibition of skills and a contest for honors. Thirty-two pilots had paired off and competed. The winner of each encounter advanced.

Neffess and Nata had swiftly eliminated their competitors. Today was the final pairing. Either Neffess or Nata would own the distinction of the annual's best fighter pilot.

"Instinctual pilots," Fleet Admiral Tatia Tachenko commented.

The bridges of the city-ships, *Freedom* and *Our People*, were crowded with observers, who watched the mock fight on the holo-vids. The audiences were linked by audio via the ships' controllers.

"It's difficult to believe that they've just graduated from flight training school," Rear Admiral Adrianna Plummer commented.

"Their aggressive techniques are a manifestation of their personalities," Z said. "I approve."

"My entertaining partner approves of any individual who is reluctant to retreat," Miranda said sweetly.

Alex Racine, the Omnian co-leader, had chosen to link through the *Freedom* directly to the travelers' controllers. He studied the pilots' seemingly erratic maneuvers, which were designed to confuse. The contest pitted a wild one, a human clone who was rescued from the derelict colony ship *New Terra*, against a Dischnya. He didn't have to imagine the human's raucous laughter or the Dischnya's excited barks and yips. He could hear them.

The Dischnya nests had voted. It had been an extraordinary shift of power from the queens to the nests. The soma, the entire body of Dischnya, had decided to adopt Omnian personal tech — implants and medical nanites. The queens had held divided opinions, but Queens

Nyslara and Homsaff had prevailed to ensure that the entire Dischnya population of Omnia could choose.

Nyslara's daughter, Neffess, was leading the Dischnya pups into the future. The nests' old ways were slowly being left behind by these young ones. They'd embraced technical education and training programs that facilitated their ability to enter Omnian society.

A strong element of the Dischnya warrior culture remained. It was epitomized by Queen Homsaff and her warriors, who had been so effective in defeating Artifice, the artificial intelligence (AI) ruler of the federacy.

Z signaled the observers via comm. He'd detected increased biorhythms in the pilots and was warning the audiences of impending actions.

Neffess's excitement rose. She'd posited where Nata would be stationary. It was a matter of thinking like her friend and how she would have planned her ambush. She couldn't visualize the orientation of her pursuer's ship, but then a thought occurred to her, and she realized it didn't matter. If it hadn't been for the restriction of Neffess's helmet, her long tongue would have been lolling outside her muzzle.

Reversing orientation, Neffess slid along the ecliptic, intending to cross to Nata's asteroid. Her plan was to come at Nata from underneath her ship. That eliminated the concern about which direction Nata's fighter faced. She was certain that her friend was oriented parallel to the ecliptic.

Nata knew she couldn't wait. Neffess was as aggressive a pilot as herself. Neither were fans of defensive strategies. She chose to move. With her traveler above the ecliptic, she circled overtop of the asteroids.

As each traveler crossed the open space between the rocks, telemetry signaled the presence of the other ship. The pilots allowed the controllers to engage. Bows swung to engage, and beams fired at enemies.

"Who won?" Tatia inquired of Z.

Only the SADEs, self-aware digital entities, had the abilities to monitor the encounters. In this case, Z was a SADE who was well-known for his preference of mathematical precision, and he'd been appointed referee for the graduation exercises.

“The contest rules were violated by the interference of controllers,” Z pointed out. He was linked to the Trident warships that were tasked with observing each challenge.

“Did you make a wager, Tatia?” Mickey Brandon, Alex Racine’s chief engineer, teased.

It was known that more than a few credits had been bet on this highly anticipated encounter. As to the expected winner of this final contest, the odds were even. Both Nata and Neffess were thought to be equal to the challenge.

Tatia turned her heavy-worlder body toward Z. Her hands were held at the small of her back, and her countenance was every bit Alex’s fleet commander.

In a calm, but firm tone, Tatia said, “I appreciate your exactness, Z. Now that we’ve been informed that the pilots allowed the controllers to intercede in contravention of naval academy engagement rules, which we know do not reflect combat conditions ... who won?”

Z shared via comms the timing difference between the beam strikes as recorded by the controllers. It wasn’t until the ninth decimal place that the hits differentiated.

“Statistics aside,” Captain Alain de Long, Tatia’s partner, said, “they essentially eliminated each other.”

“I would agree,” Vice Admiral Ellie Thompson added. Her arm was wrapped around the other de Long twin, Étienne.

There was a relaxed atmosphere on the city-ships’ bridges.

“Well, Alex, do we abide by academy rules, statistics, or combat rules?” Tatia asked.

<This should be good,> Omnian co-leader Renée de Guirnon, sent privately to her partner, Alex. Her back nestled against Alex’s broad chest, and his arms encompassed her.

Nine SADEs shared the city-ships’ bridges. They were enjoying the time of peace for the fleets.

“Has anyone ever known me to fight a Dagger or a traveler?” Alex asked. It was a rhetorical question. He’d been many things in the course of his fifty-plus New Terran years, but he’d never been a fighter pilot.

“Of course not,” Alex said, answering his own question. “Therefore, I’m not qualified to judge the outcome. However, I’m curious to know how the challenge has been viewed by others.”

<Clever of you, my love,> Renée sent.

“Cordelia, if you would do me a favor,” Alex requested cordially. “Conduct two votes, the totals of which are never to be revealed. Query all fleet personnel in the admirals’ chains of command from traveler pilot up. Ask them how they judge the outcome. Then query the fleets’ SADEs. Ask them the same question.”

Alex sipped on his drink, and he fondly nuzzled the top of Renée’s hair.

With the aid of SADE comms and human implants, the voting was shortly completed.

“I’m ready, Alex,” Cordelia, Julien’s partner and a fleet rear admiral, said. She wore a cryptic smile. Alex had sealed the vote with his privacy request, and her emotional algorithms were elevated in anticipation of what he might ask of her.

“Is there consensus among the SADEs, Admiral?” Alex asked.

“No, Alex, there isn’t,” Cordelia replied. She’d anticipated his question correctly. His next question was a foregone conclusion.

“Was there consensus among the fleet personnel?” asked Alex, who couldn’t help but grin. He was thoroughly enjoying the moment with his friends — humans, SADEs, and Dischnya. Unfortunately, his Swei Swee friends had no interest in the contests.

“No, Alex, there isn’t,” Cordelia replied. She released the sounds of an ancient symphony’s crescendo to reverberate throughout both bridges.

“There you have it,” Alex said to his audience.

“There you have what?” Mickey asked.

Pia Sabine, the fleet’s chief medical officer and Mickey’s partner, snuggled closer to his heavy body and covered her smirk. She knew who Mickey had wagered on.

Tatia grinned. She could tell by Mickey’s tone that he’d bet on the outcome too, and she was enjoying that someone else was discomfited by the lack of a definitive decision.

Alex's head came up, and his eyes focused on his audience. "If the best judges of preciseness don't agree, and those who fight our warships don't agree, then it seems only fitting to declare the contest a tie," he said. In his deep voice, which commanded finality, he added, "Fleet Admiral Tachenko, please announce the results."

"But what about the bets ... those who made them, I mean," Mickey complained. His question produced laughter and snickers on the bridges.

"Unless someone bet on a tie, I would presume all bets are canceled," the voice of Rear Admiral Alphons Jagielski was heard over the *Freedom's* bridge speakers. He and others, like Fleet Admiral Hector, Trixie, Lydia, and Rear Admiral Adrianna Plummer, were aboard the *Our People*.

"You presume correctly, Alphons," Alex said. He sent Renée an image of them walking side by side. In turn, she released his arms, turned, and slipped an arm around his waist. They quietly strolled off the bridge.

"That was an outcome I didn't see coming," Vice Admiral Reiko Shimada said. She regarded her partner, Rear Admiral Franz Cohen. "How did you vote?" she asked.

Franz's booming laughter chased Alex and Renée down the bridge passageway. "No, you're getting nothing out of me," he said. "I'm satisfied with the decision of a tie, and I love the way Alex determined it."

"You're no fun," Reiko complained, with a pout.

"Oh, yes I am, and you know it," Franz replied.

Reiko was an Earther, and a slender one at that. Her mass wasn't a challenge to a heavy-worlder body like Franz's. He wrapped his arms around Reiko's waist, picked her off the deck, and marched off the bridge.

Alain eyed Tatia and waggled his eyebrows. She burst out in hearty laughter. "I suppose you want me to carry you off the bridge?" she inquired. She received an image of her broad back exiting the bridge. Alain, her Méridien partner, was slung over her shoulder. His head was up, and he was waving goodbye. "Come on, silly," she said, chuckling. She slipped a hand in his, and they too left.

In short order, the bridge cleared of humans. Six SADEs remained. They were Julien, Cordelia, Z, Miranda, Miriam, and Luther. The same was true of the *Our People's* bridge. Hector, Trixie, and Lydia waited.

<Julien,> Miranda sent, after the nine SADEs linked. <This is the opportunity the Dischnya pups and the wild ones, who follow Neffess and Nata, have been anticipating.>

<Alex is aware of the Dischnya's desire to investigate their original home world, Sawa,> Julien replied. <He does not perceive that as a priority for the *Freedom's* fleet.>

Hector swiftly processed Julien's remarks. The conclusion was obvious and singular in nature. It was Hector's new fleet, which was formed around the *Our People*, with Ellie Thompson as vice admiral, which would assume responsibility for any issues about Sawa.

The Dischnya queens longed to visit Sawa. It was one planet closer to Omnia's star, Celus. A decade ago, a small group of Omnians had paid a single visit to the planet, and it hadn't gone well. Sawa was no longer green. Windstorms swept the surface, increasing in ferocity and strength throughout the day, as the planet's face rotated to meet the star's strong rays.

The Sawa soma had retreated from the surface and regressed into fractious tribes, fighting for the limited resources. The queens used intimidation and force to maintain rule over the nests.

Hector knew Alex hoped Omnia's Dischnya, whom he loved, would never visit their home world. However, and by necessity, the SADEs were party to the implant communications between the young Dischnya and the wild ones. They knew Alex's hopes were destined to be dashed.

<My fleet can manage a request from the queens, if they insist,> Hector sent. Left unspoken was the possibility of unauthorized visits to Sawa.

<Alex has confidence in your fleet's capabilities,> Cordelia sent. <It has been proven beyond doubt.>

The emotional algorithms of the three SADEs aboard the *Our People* elevated. Compliments weren't coveted by SADEs, but when they originated from Alex, they were appreciated as signs of acceptance by humans.

<The latest report from Esteban indicates that Olawale's fleet has searched twenty-nine stars with planets in the habitable zones, and they've

yet to discover a sentient society,> Z sent. <They continue their search for the *Honora Belle's* colonists. Julien, this would be an opportune moment.>

<I concur,> Miriam sent.

Every SADE in the link, but Cordelia, echoed Z's thought to Julien. Cordelia didn't need to communicate her opinion to Julien. He knew it.

As for Julien, he was well aware of the SADEs' growing desire about this subject. They believed it paramount to know the practices of House Brixton, the Confederation's business entity that created SADEs.

Without that knowledge, SADEs would always be a stagnant society. They could only create copies, akin to the process that generated the Sisterhood. That wasn't what the SADEs wanted.

The conversation of these SADEs represented a consensus that Julien should approach Alex to act now to pry the secrets from Brixton.

<I will speak with Alex,> Julien sent, and the links were closed.

Cordelia and Julien remained alone on the *Freedom's* bridge.

<Is Alex ready?> Cordelia asked Julien.

<Yes. This was discussed in the Talus system, when the sisters left the fleet,> Julien sent in reply. <He believes the SADEs approach a societal maturation point.>

<That we have the right and now the preference to control our destiny,> Cordelia noted.

<Just so,> Julien sent. <From our boxes to our avatars and financial independence in mere decades. The next step in our evolution is to understand how we've been created as individuals.>

<The processes employed by House Brixton have eluded our research,> Cordelia pointed out. <The examples we've seen, Faustus and Artifice, have been poor attempts at imitating the balance we possess between computational power and emotional integration.>

<Alex is aware that we've yet to discover Brixton's technique,> Julien sent. <He believes that, in time, we might solve the problem, but he feels it's dependent on him to ensure that we possess the information before star services are said over him.>

<Which brings us to our first hurdle. Who will sail to Méridien?> Cordelia asked.

<Commanders will insist on the fleet,> Julien remarked.

<Normally, Julien, you would agree with them, but I don't detect that from your words.>

<Not this time,> Julien sent. <I would ask for the *Rêveur* to be sent there. The liner sends the appropriate message to the Confederation's Council Leaders.>

<What? We come in peace?> Cordelia quipped, quoting an ancient vid. The tinkling of silver bells accompanied her communications.

<Precisely,> Julien allowed.

<The Confederation isn't always a safe place,> Cordelia pointed out. She was reminded of Libre, a penal colony for the Confederation's Independents.

When Cordelia and Julien met, he'd been a visitor to the system. She was as immobile as he was, ensconced in their boxes. But, while he was safely aboard the *Rêveur*, she inhabited the bridge of a half-constructed city-ship, not knowing if it would sail before the dangerous Nua'll sphere arrived. To demonstrate her point, she mentioned the three battleships fleets, which had recently left federacy space. Only two of the fleets had been located.

<What will you advise Alex?> Cordelia asked Julien.

Julien regarded his partner. His trademark fedora appeared on his head, imaged there by his synth skin's holo-vid capability. He smiled and said, <I'll follow Alex's example. He pointed out that he'd never engaged a fighter in combat. Well, I've never matched wits with a House Leader.>

* * * * *

Renée, Tatia, Julien, Cordelia, Z, and Miranda were quiet. They sat or stood in the salon of the *Freedom's* owner suite.

Alex had announced his intention to sail to Méridien and confront Shannon Brixton for the information about SADE creation. He'd also proposed how he intended to travel. That's when the arguments ensued.

Then Cordelia had interrupted the discussion and suggested a moment to reflect.

“Think about the purpose of the visit,” Alex urged, after the silence had extended for a few moments.

“Intimidation would work better,” Tatia insisted. “Our fleet orbiting Méridien should convince Leaders to support our request. They could coerce House Brixton into divulging its processes.”

It’s not that, as a New Terran, Tatia had no love for the Confederation Council. It was that, as fleet admiral, she’d commanded many battles that saw the loss of numerous humans and SADEs. She felt the SADEs were owed, and if this was how they wanted recompense, then she wanted that for them.

“While I would tend to agree with Tatia about sending the fleet with Alex,” Renée said, “in this case, it’s not appropriate. The Council won’t react well to the presence of our ships after we announce the reason for our visit.”

“Examined from the Council’s viewpoint,” Julien interjected, “Leaders would be reluctant to support us in leveraging information from House Brixton. In the future, the same tactic could be used against any one of their Houses.”

“Does anyone believe that Leader Shannon Brixton will willingly share the one critical asset that supports her House business?” Miranda asked.

“I don’t expect her to cooperate simply because we ask,” Alex replied.

“Julien, have you heard from Winston?” Tatia asked.

“We’ve exchanged information regularly since our return to Omnia,” Julien replied. “I’ve never broached the subject of House Brixton. It would have been premature.”

“Would he help us pressure Shannon Brixton?” Tatia asked.

“There is every reason to believe Confederation SADEs want this information as much as Omnian and Haraken SADEs do,” Julien noted.

“Which doesn’t answer the admiral’s question,” Miranda pointed out. “There’s sufficient proof that Confederation SADEs might side with the Council against our request.”

Miranda quickly sublimated the algorithmic core that initiated her remarks. It had originated from a portion of Allora's kernel that Miranda had never deleted. The young SADE, who had given her kernel to Miranda, retained hostility for her fellow SADEs who didn't come to her rescue. They had the power to bring Confederation processes to a halt, but they remained mute in the face of the Council's demand that Allora be isolated and studied for her act of resistance.

<Allora had a right to be angry, Miranda,> Alex sent privately to the SADE.

"It looks like I'm in the minority," Tatia said reluctantly. "Then I guess it's accepted that you're taking a single ship." She appeared unhappy, and she desultorily eyed Renée for failing to support her.

"Just one," Alex replied. He was surprised that Tatia had relented so quickly. Then, unexpectedly, he faced a wall of smiles.

"One ship," Tatia agreed, suddenly nodding amiably. "The *Freedom*," she added, with a wolfish smile.

"It beats being cramped aboard a Trident," Renée remarked. She kissed Alex on the cheek and sent, <I love it when you cooperate with us.>

"The *Freedom* is your usual accommodation, Alex," Julien pointed out. "Its appearance wouldn't elicit the Council's concern, and it does befit your status."

Alex knew he'd been maneuvered. It happened more and more lately, and his close companions were getting quite good at it. His lopsided smile accompanied a resigned shake of his head. "Cordelia, do me a favor. Please, don't roll out the rail-mounted beam guns while we're in Méridien's orbit."

2: I'm in Charge?

Hector received word from Julien, as did every other SADE, of Alex's intention to meet with Leader Brixton. That was expected. What caught Hector unaware was the call from Tatia.

<Admiral Hector, you've overall command status in my absence,> Tatia sent. <I'll be sailing for Méridien with Alex aboard the *Freedom*. Effective immediately, command of our combined fleets is your responsibility.>

Tatia smiled, as the silence dragged on. It was a rare thing to confound a SADE. She could imagine the enormous number of calculations taking place in Hector's kernel.

<Hector,> Tatia sent, wrapping her thought in gentle understanding, <your primary tasks are fleet politics and prioritization in the event you receive dire news and must sail. You've already demonstrated a flair for delegation. There are wonderfully dedicated and courageous members in this fleet, who won't let you down.>

<You honor me, Admiral Tachenko,> Hector sent. <I'll heed your advice.>

Tatia ended the call and mused about her decision. She'd debated whether to appoint one of the fleet's vice admirals over Hector. In the end, she thought that would be an affront to the SADEs. She'd chosen Hector and then hoped the *Freedom* would return to Omnia before anything untoward happened in the galaxy.

From across the fleet, aboard stations, and on the planet, SADEs sent their congratulations to Hector. Human admirals to captains added their readiness to support him.

Nata picked up the announcement, at the same time as did those at the table. She shared a thought with Neffess. The two lieutenants were enjoying a celebratory meal with Nyslara and Pussiro.

“No,” Nyslara said perfunctorily, popping a piece of food into her mouth.

Nata checked her implant comms app. She was certain she’d linked only with Neffess.

“No, what?” Nata asked innocently.

“Pups,” Pussiro chortled.

Nata projected an air of offense at the demeaning term, but the dark eyes of the veteran wasat gazed down a scarred grayed muzzle at her. It was enough to force Nata to drop her gaze.

“Your intention is not how we treat those who’ve befriended us,” Pussiro remonstrated.

“How can we ask Alex’s permission to visit Sawa if he leaves from Méridien on a faraway emergency?” Neffess proffered. She was as anxious as Nata to employ her newly acquired piloting skills on a mission, such as a visit to Sawa.

“Alex will return to Omnia before he leaves for anywhere else,” Pussiro replied.

“That’s not necessary,” Nata pointed out. “The *Freedom* can join with the fleet on its way to the destination.”

Nyslara pushed her unfinished plate away. It was an indication of her irritation. “You think about your fighters and your flying,” she said, with a queen’s demeanor. “Annuals from now, you’ll either be dead, lost in a fight, or you’ll still be lieutenants. Do you know how I know this?”

Neffess and Nata shared blank looks before they regarded Nyslara.

“It’s that you’re too busy with self-promotion instead of being concerned for those around you,” Nyslara stated sharply. Then she abruptly left the table. As she exited the room, her long slender tail whip-cracked the air.

Nata’s jaw tightened at the rebuke, but Neffess stared bewilderedly at her patriarch.

“As a race, we were slowly dying on this planet, socially and technologically devolving,” Pussiro explained. “Then Alex came. He asked only two things of us ... to end the attacks against the Swei Swee and accept his friendship. For that, a queen and her wasat tried to kill him.”

“I’d heard that,” Neffess said.

Nata’s open mouth said that she hadn’t.

“You spoke of the ease with which Alex’s city-ship could meet with the fleet as his warships sailed toward a destination,” Pussiro continued. “You understand about sailing the stars but not about those who do. Alex always returns to Omnia before he sails. He does this to say goodbye to Wave Skimmer and Nyslara, in case he never returns.”

When Pussiro finished, he left the table and an unfinished meal behind. In the days of the Dischnya nests, when the soma lived underground, there was no greater remonstrance than leaving scarce food on the plate. It demonstrated disdain for the speaker or speakers. It was usually reserved for those who had challenged the elders’ ways.

Nata started to speak, but Neffess uttered a soft growl.

“I’ve never received this reprimand from my matriarch or patriarch,” Neffess said, indicating the partially emptied plates across from them.

“We’re the new generation,” Nata stated hotly. “We’ll —”

Neffess’s deeper growl cut Nata off.

“No more pressure,” Neffess stated flatly. “We’ve gone too far. Our time will come when the queens request Alex’s assistance or his delegates.”

Nata glared at her friend. It was the nature of their relationship that they frequently argued and strenuously so. Soon afterward, the harsh words were forgotten, and they were laughing and chatting again.

Neffess reached across the table for Pussiro’s plate and scraped the remains onto Nata’s plate. Then she picked up Nyslara’s plate, adding the food to hers. To Nata’s quizzical look, she said, “We’re offering apology for our immaturity. Eat up ... every piece of it. Then we’ll leave the plates where they can be observed.”

* * * * *

Ellie watched the *Freedom* exit the Omnian system by dropping below the ecliptic. She had mixed emotions. It wasn’t that she wanted to be aboard the city-ship. That wasn’t what pained her. It was her new reality.

She was no longer part of the fleet that supported the *Freedom*. Even if those Tridents had sailed with Alex, she would have remained behind. She commanded the fleet of warships that defended the second city-ship, the *Our People*.

With the transfer to Hector's fleet, Ellie missed the close connection time she enjoyed with her fellow Librans, when the fleets separated. However, one deep pleasure had been reserved for her. Her partner, Étienne de Long, had been assigned to the fleet too with Commodore Descartes' squadrons.

Sighing deeply, Ellie severed the link to the *Our People's* controller and made her way to the captain's quarters. She joined Hector, Lydia, Rear Admirals Alphons Jagielski and Adrianna Plummer, Commodore Descartes, and Senior Captains Étienne and Alain de Long.

"You requested the meeting, Admiral," Hector said, as Ellie sat at the table.

"After our engagements in the Toralian and Chistorlan systems, it's obvious that, in the near future, we'll face more belligerent federacy battleships fleets," Ellie began. "I think it's time to consider other offensive options."

"Do we abide by Alex's preference to incur minimal damage, Admiral?" Descartes asked.

"I think that goes without saying," Ellie replied. "Besides, any strategy that seeks to best aggressive federacy fleets through annihilation is prohibitive. We can't afford to construct, launch, and crew the massive number of ships that are the equal of those battleships. The task I'm asking this table to undertake is the design of workable offensive concepts. Alex and his senior staff can choose among them and decide when and how to employ the solutions we create."

"Under those conditions," Étienne said, "it would be strategically effective to deliver the strike against the lead battleship."

"Agreed," Alain quickly said. "The federacy's fleet commander and any appointed leader will be aboard the greatest battleship, which will lead the wedge."

“That’s also the battleship that’s in the center of the wedge, which is a formation that allows the fleet to launch the greatest spread of missiles toward an opponent. That makes it the toughest target,” Alphons noted.

“If the admiral’s goal is to provide an offensive tactic, while minimizing the risk to our forces,” Lydia said, “then we must rely on attributes of high velocity, evasion intelligence, and numbers.”

“Utilizing those factors,” Descartes added, “would require a significantly sized delivery vehicle. That rules out a freighter to deliver them to the enemy fleet. Either it would be too slow to evacuate the field after launch, or it would be forced to launch too far out.”

“What if we don’t attempt to strike a battleship?” Adrianna volunteered. “As Alphons said, we know federacy fleets can throw thousands of missiles at whatever we launch at them, not to mention their close gun support. Let’s accept that and plan on delivering something that neutralizes their offensive capability.”

“How are battleships most vulnerable?” Alphons asked rhetorically. “Like every other ship, it’s through their electrical systems.”

“Are you proposing the use of nuclear-tipped weaponry?” Hector asked.

“No,” Alphons replied emphatically, raising his hands in protest. “But what about an NNEMP pulse?”

“The delivery of a close proximity nonnuclear electromagnetic pulse could target the fleet’s lead battleship, with a minimal, if not negligible effect, on the other ships,” Lydia theorized. “Much would depend on being able to get our weapon near enough.”

“What type of distance are we talking about?” Ellie asked.

Lydia blinked. Her comms had been inundated by the comments of other SADEs, who were closely monitoring the conversation. “The simple answer, Admiral, is that it depends,” Lydia replied. “The larger the carrier vessel; the larger the EMP generator. The larger the generator; the greater the pulse. The greater the pulse; the farther from the lead battleship it can be triggered.”

“Then these would be critical design constraints,” Ellie said. “As the commodore points out, a freighter can’t deliver this type of weapon. It would have to be carried and launched by our Tridents. A result of this

strategy might be that we reduce the number of fighters those Tridents carry. I think a fighter admiral might have a problem with that.”

There were some polite chuckles at the veiled mention of Franz.

“I think the admiral would be happy if his pilots didn’t have to engage a battleship fleet, if it could be avoided,” Alphons said quietly, which engendered a lot of head nodding.

“If the lead battleship could be rendered inert, we would have delivered our message with minimal damage,” Adrianna said. “Certainly, some crew, if they were touching metal, would be electrocuted by the high voltage conducted through the electrical systems. However, the majority could be safely evacuated.”

“Then, after the fleet abandoned their lead battleship, we’d be faced with disposing of an enormous vessel full of explosive armament, whose electrical control and power systems were fried,” Ellie remarked.

“Difficult, but not impossible,” Descartes offered. “Presumably, the battleship possessed velocity at the time we eliminated its electrical circuits. We might be fortunate that its trajectory will allow it to safely exit the system. Considering the volume of space, it might sail for a lengthy period of time before being impacted by asteroids and comets. Then again, it might wander into a star’s gravitational field.”

“How far should we take the development process?” Alain asked. “Alex and Tatia are depending on this fleet to take a robust role in peacekeeping. The sooner we develop such a weapon, the sooner we save a good many Omnian lives.”

“I agree with your assessment, Captain,” Hector replied. “I’ll authorize prototype construction of any design this committee approves.”

When Hector’s audience regarded him with knitted brows, he added, “Alex granted me permission to access Omnia Ships’ credit reserves for any project I consider worthwhile.”

The doubting faces were immediately transformed into smiles.

“It would be expedient to use banisher shells,” Étienne said. “Many of them are already built, and we’ve the manufacturing bay on the Sardi-Tallen Orbital Platform, which can be augmented to construct a new version.”

“We’ll need the SADEs for designs, Hector,” Ellie requested.

“I’ve delegated Lydia to organize the suggestions,” Hector replied.

“They’re accumulating now,” Lydia commented. “The community is comparing them to make further refinements to those considered most feasible. The final versions will vary in pulse duration and power, which, in turn, will affect the vessel’s size and build time.”

“That’s great for the weapon’s design,” Adrianna said, “but that doesn’t help us with delivery. We saw the extent of antimissile walls that battleship fleets put up. A single EMP vessel or even several of them won’t get close enough to the lead enemy ship.”

The table’s holo-vid lit, driven by Descartes. “The approach might be easier than you imagine,” he said. “We’ve ample evidence that the majority of federacy fleets prefer to approach a system on the ecliptic. Furthermore, they expect to encounter another fleet on the same plane, which is why most of their armament is focused forward.”

The holo-vid displayed a fleet of nine battleships in the typical wedge formation. They shrunk to yellow dots. A set of blue dots appeared above and below the enemy fleet.

“Tridents could approach the lead battleship from ninety degrees off its trajectory. I’d recommend vectors from slightly behind the lead battleship, approaching the ship from its weakest defensive angles,” Descartes explained. “Our warships could impart significant velocity to the EMP vessels before they launch them.”

“The launch of the EMP vessels would have the Tridents’ velocity, but with banisher grav engines, they’d be unable to charge their power cells until they entered the system’s gravitational field,” Étienne objected. “That would limit their evasion capability.”

“There is that consideration,” Descartes acknowledged.

“If we use standard drive engines, the banisher shells won’t be suitable,” Lydia pointed out.

“I like the concept of an EMP burst weapon, and I like Descartes’s approach using multiple Tridents to launch from above and below the lead ship,” Ellie stated. “Now, we need to make it work within a vessel that we can construct efficiently, economically, and in number.”

“Perhaps, we’re being overly demanding of our design,” Hector said. “Instead of attempting to construct the perfect weapon, it might prove useful to build enough prototypes to use in the engagements of the next two federacy fleets. Then we can evaluate our prototypes to determine the soundness of our strategy.”

“Which part of our strategy concerns you, Hector?” Ellie asked. “Do you have doubts about the EMP burst’s effectiveness or our ability to deliver it close enough to the lead ship?”

“Both,” Hector replied. “Therefore, I suggest we use banisher shells with their grav engines. The Tridents can impart their velocity before release. When an EMP vessel nears the system’s gravitational forces, it will be capable of extensive maneuvering and evasion. We’ll program it to cycle and fire its EMP burst before it can be destroyed by the fleet’s antimissile launches.”

“That just gave me an idea,” Étienne said enthusiastically. “SADEs can time the Tridents to attack in sequence.”

“Yes,” Alain declared, anticipating his twin’s plan. “As an EMP vessel encounters the fleet’s defensive missiles, they can fire. That will turn the enemy’s nearby armament into errant bombs.”

“I like that,” Ellie said, smiling. “A staggered series of EMP pulses will clear the way for later vessels to get closer to the lead ship. Lydia, finalize the best proposals around these factors. We’ll meet when you’re ready.”

“Will now be appropriate, Admiral?” Lydia replied, with a serene smile.

Laughing, Ellie said, “Most appropriate.”

The holo-vid displayed a cutaway of a banisher shell.

“This first design lacks any significant defect in our requirements, but by doing so it achieves average results in all categories,” Lydia said.

My Books

SADEs is the nineteenth novel in [The Silver Ships](#) and [Pyreans](#) interwoven series, which tell the stories of three Earth colonies. It's 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 (forthcoming)

Pyreans Series

Empaths

Messinants

Jatouche

Veklocks

The Author



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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