

Tomorrow's Edge Trilogy Three

# SILENT STARS

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*“O God! Thy arm was here, and not to us, but to Thy arm alone,  
ascribe we all.” – William Shakespeare, Henry V, Act IV, scene 8,  
line 111*

*This book is dedicated the glory of God without Whom there are no  
words worthy of writing and to my mom, who quietly encouraged and  
not so quietly championed my dream of being an author.*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It's hard to believe we're here. At the finish of this series that's been with me for over a decade now. The Lord has been good to me, far better than I could ever deserve. It's taken six years to see each book in print, a long journey for any reader to undertake with an author. So, first I must thank the Lord for His patience with me, a rather crude utensil, and grace to craft something like this.

I hope sincerely that this book and series touched your heart reading it as much as my own writing it. Thank you, reader, and to all the readers who have supported and encouraged me and made the world of *Tomorrow's Edge* so much more thrilling to explore because I have such fantastic company for the expedition.

Thank you to Linda Fulkerson for giving me the chance to share this story and complete this trilogy. It is an immense honor and profound privilege to have this book as part of the Expanse Books catalogue. You embody everything an author wants most in their publisher.

To Erin Howard who put me on the path to Expanse Books and has been a phenomenal editor for this and so many other of my books. Thank you for bettering each one of them and in particular for this one which has such special significance to me.

Though she doesn't like attention or compliments lavished on her, my wife, Shelly, has been wonderful to me through the writing of this book. Even for writers not on the NYT Best Sellers

List, perhaps especially for writers not yet there, every book requires an extraordinary amount of sacrifice. And no author can do it (and come out the other end without serious health issues) apart from their family shouldering some of that sacrifice. Shelly has done that time and again. She encourages me as I'm writing and supports me even when the story isn't one she'd personally choose to read and especially when it means things are harder day-to-day at home for her. There is no doubt this book would have been a moonshot to finish if it wasn't for her.

Though I'm grown with a son of my own, my parents, Pat and Rodger, continue to teach me daily about what sacrificial love looks like. I hope I can be a fraction of the inspiration, encouragement, and source of strength and support my parents have been to me. Sometimes a child's dreams come with heavy burdens and my parents have never shied from helping me lift any load that needs born.

Thank you to Professor James Harms, who sent me out on a rainy day to do a creative writing assignment and thereby put me in the right place at the right time to be transported to the *Tomorrow's Edge* world for the first time.

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love in Christ and Light to guide me, there is no doubt in me that this book and every other I've written would never have been. Benevolent, merciful, and painstaking in tending to me. To God be all the glory.





***For the choir director. A psalm of David.***

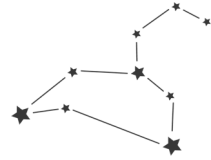
*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge.*

*Psalm 19:1-2*



# CHAPTER 1

## BEST INTENTIONS



*“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues.”*

*—All’s Well That Ends Well, Act IV, scene 3, lines 68-69*

TAPPING his fingers on the table to a frantic rhythm, Elliott glanced at the digital display. In another ten minutes, he had to meet up with Lara. He was cutting this too close.

The menu flickered and flashed a message, “COMPLETE.” Elliott breathed in a sigh of relief and gestured to the holographic display to eject his flash media. Whatever he’d downloaded, he hoped it was worthwhile. His past two attempts at gathering data on where the true records Project Alexandria had hidden were unsuccessful. His grandfather’s “Veiled Sun” program sent them to a secure location, but Elliott had no idea where that was. This time there was also a genuine chance he would get caught.

He checked the camera feed he’d sieged into. It displayed the manifestation of his worst fears—a pair of dark vehicles sliding into parking slots from the mag-lev highway. The Feds had found him.

Found them both, actually. Lara was several blocks away, talking to her mom on a special mobile Elliott had designed for her. It could only be used every so often, but it let her have brief, unmonitored chats with her mother. At least unmonitored from their side. The authorities, if slick enough, could listen in on calls from Lara's mom's side. But they would have to know to surveil her conversations, and after laying low for three months, Elliott doubted she was being watched.

Four agents, three men and a woman, deployed from the vehicles. All dressed in dark outfits. All bearing sleek, silver mini-rail guns. They were about two minutes from crashing through the door to Elliott.

Fortunately, he had planned for this possibility. In half a minute, he had stowed everything he needed in his backpack, including the mysterious device his grandfather had given him at his death. Checking the camera feed once more, he noted the positions of the agents and opened the door. He hesitated half a second to take in a deep breath. A sharp crack, as of wood being split, shattered the quiet as shards of the door were launched down the hall.

Elliott stumbled backward and hit the ground hard. His heart thudded in his chest. The automated door swung shut again, the holes left by the mini-rail gun slugs giving off faint swirls of smoke. How had the agents gotten there so fast?

Elliott looked over at the display. It showed the agents motioning to one another, preparing to advance. But they were still blocks away, by an Italian restaurant. There was no way they made that shot. That's when he saw the reflections in the window. Or rather lack thereof. He was in the midst of a live deepfake. Someone had caught his camera access and sieged the stream. Whoever had done it made the agents appear farther away than in reality. In seconds, they'd be on him.

Taking that steadying breath he needed, he offered a simple prayer.

*Lord, help me!*

Scrambling to the door, he tore off its biometric scanner panel and ripped out some wiring. He had to hope he had disabled it.

Elliott sprinted to the windows and opened one. He was on the second floor of the town hall. The only thing near enough to climb down on was a shaky-looking serviceberry tree. A loud thump startled Elliott as he threw a leg out the open window. At his back the automated door was wildly opening and shutting instead of staying closed.

*Oh, boy.*

Definitely not the plan. There were some low muttered curses from beyond the door, and Elliott realized one of the agents had been struck just before entering. Better than his plan.

He didn't stick around to see how they felt about it. Leaping to his feet after dropping the last three feet out of the tree, he wiped the blue serviceberry juice onto his pants and took off running.

Two blocks down, he ducked into an alley. From nearby, he heard an agent call out, "Fan out and check the next three blocks. We should have access to the area's camera feeds any moment."

The agents out in the streets looking for him were a problem, but once they had the remaining video feeds, it was all over. He had to make a getaway plan. Fast.

Elliott felt a vibration in his pocket. Frantic, he grabbed for it and hoped the agents hadn't heard it. Or what he was about to say.

"Hey Julie," he said just above a whisper. Though silly to hide it from Lara, he tried to sound calm.

"Rome, are you okay?"

Her use of their aliases let him know she knew he wasn't. They were utilizing short-link communication devices that worked something akin to Bluetooth. He'd designed them for keeping in touch since normal mobiles were out of the question. At least if they wanted to keep from being caught. The devices only worked within a certain distance of one another. About a quarter mile or so. He had run away from her position

instinctively, that she had called meant she was already en route to him.

“Just living my best life as usual.”

He hated the phrase, but it was a common old expression. If their signal was picked up it would seem benign to surveillance algorithms.

“Oh, too bad. I thought I’d swing by and brighten your day,” she said, a natural tinge of snark to her comment.

“I’ll never say no to having you around. The brightness is like the sun to the moon.”

There was silence on the other end. Whether it was because she could hear the sincerity in his voice and was touched or was annoyed it was hard to say. No one talked as floridly as that anymore. Which would send a possible alert up. Elliott couldn’t help it. The choice of code names drawn from Shakespeare’s star-crossed lovers was apropos for them. And if he was about to be captured, he wanted their last words to be genuine and tender.

“You would’ve been enjoying that brightness sooner, but you weren’t at the usual hangout,” she commented at length.

*Oops.*

If she had already tried their meeting place then he had badly misjudged the timing. Which meant he’d either have to lie to her now or spill his secrets.

The sound of a boot sole crunching across loose stones caught Elliott’s attention. One of the agents was almost on him.

Elliott turned down the volume on his mock-mobile. He took a breath and stood. Reaching into his pack, he produced an apple, their last bit of fresh produce. Almost a treasure, while on the run. He lobbed it across the street and struck the side of a parked car. Gunfire immediately tore into the side of the vehicle.

Elliott ran the opposite direction, rounding the corner and dashing under an awning at a full sprint.

The gunfire stopped. They must have figured out his simple trick and were converging on him. He couldn’t spare a glance

back to see. All he could hear was his heart's frantic thumping in his ears and his deep breathing. Ahead there was another street corner, and he had to get to the crosswalk before a car reached it and threw up the electronic gates along the sidewalk.

Five strides. Still clear. Four. Clear. Three. Clear. Two. He wasn't stopping no matter what.

One. A car zipped into the intersection.