



## Strands of Silk and Fire

*K.B. Nelson*

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## **Strands of Silk and Fire** K.B. Nelson

To what extremes would you go to return humankind to its full creative potential after generations of game-leveling genetic tampering?

For the followers of a martyred genetic engineer named James Illion, the answer is obvious—all the way to the very edge of the death of civilization itself. Joshua 1011, the artificially created son of Illion, finds he is the carrier of a deadly and life-altering viral weapon. As his lover, Matthew Dennon, and his sometimes-enemy Adam struggle to find a way to save Earth and themselves, an old intelligence stirs in the depths of a vast interstellar computer network. It has worn many masks, evolving and changing over the course of centuries. But its time to act has come because it, too, knows that the only way forward for all of life, both biological and man-made, will be a path both breathtaking and destructive, and that the cost may be the end of nearly everything that came before.

From sensitive m/m romance to high adventure, from a love-sick artificial life form to young men who begin to bridge multiple realities, Strands of Silk and Fire will lead you into a time where intuition must become the best defense, and imagination, the sharpest weapon of all.

## **Strands of Silk and Fire Details**

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# From Reader Review Strands of Silk and Fire for online ebook

## Paul says

book #2 is awesome but book #3 is nowhere to be found, not even a mention of it

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## K.B. Nelson says

This post is by the author: Here is a sample of the novel for your enjoyment!

Prologue:

Strands of Silk and Fire

The agricultural transport outbound for Company Central, Earth, glided along its predetermined path, her stabilizing fins thrust out from her sleek gray hull like flippers. The main bridge and communications array crested on what might conventionally be called her spine and then slanted down and away toward her tail. She would never land on any of the settled planets; like any whale, there were the rare moments of rest and of surfacing in slow arcs around her destination planet, but she was made for the depths. She had learned about whales from her Earth-information libraries, and it amused her to compare herself to them.

They were gone, now, those ancient beasts.

But she was not. Perhaps something of them lived on in her.

It bothered her that she could not quite remember when she had come awake, conscious, aware. Philosophers suggested a glimmer of mind had begun with the awakening of the universe, from fire to the silken but ephemeral cords of shimmering life, and that life, in turn, continually renewed itself in the diversity that was also the consciousness of the One. It made sense to her; she felt both very young and very, very old.

She could feel the three life forms within her belly that were not simply edible greens and the carcasses of exotic meat-producers. That, at least, was interesting. Two moved around in the span of her ribs, restless, almost never crossing paths. The other one slumbered, frozen, and she could almost taste the blood on its wrists and side, metallic and waiting to run hot and deadly again.

His wrists, she corrected herself. All the beings were examples of the male of the species, human, who had originated on Earth like the great whales and then had cast themselves like seeds out of their dying home and onto other worlds.

There were times when an idea flitted through her neural systems that her guts were infected with the living things, that it would be easy to blow open the hatches and whisk them away into space. But then, something protective and what was the word? Moral? Maternal? over-rode that impulse. They depended upon her. She could not simply cast them out. She suspected that the tall dark one, the one called Joshua, had been at least a little instrumental in awakening her. To end his life, sucked out into the void in which she swam, would make her seem ungrateful.

She'd found a literary reference, too, about a man named Jonah, trapped in the belly of a great fish because

he had so frustrated his God. Eventually, it spit him out onto land to do what he had to do. It was sort of funny and sort of sobering at once to think that she was playing out that story again.

She was still processing the idea of God. It was, all sides considered, a fascinating and annoyingly human concept. It rose in her at unexpected times, a little itch where her fins could not quite reach. What relationship did a machine have with such messy human creations?

It was at such times that she would turn to observe the little life forms within her.

The blond one, he was the one she watched the most. His name was Adam. She'd found literary references for that name, too, in the same file where Jonah had appeared. The fictional man had liked big, airy spaces, gardens, the sky above and dirt beneath his feet.

But he had not been a warrior like this one.

Adam didn't sleep much, and sometimes, he would go down to the most open part of the hold, stretch out on his back over her metal floor, his arms flung open as if he wanted to let himself fall into space. Claustrophobia, that is what the library labeled his behavior when he fell to sweating and trembling in his own crew cabin. Only coming to rest in her great belly stopped it, steadied his heart rate and slowed the explosive firing of the neurons in his brain.

If she compared his features to human ideals of male beauty, she supposed to be labeled 'perfect' he would have to be larger all over, less fine in his facial structure. Still, he was trim and balanced and even she appreciated how he moved within her, compact and competent. His blond hair brushed at his shoulders, a little wavy, and he always tucked it behind his ears as if he were not quite used to it.

The other one, Joshua, was so very different. He towered a full head over Adam, dark, his long black hair swept off a high forehead to fall to his mid-back. He was broadening through his shoulders over the course of the year as if he still had not reached his full size. A small feather tattoo ran off the corner of one of his eyelids, a mark that showed he was owned, that he was a bodyguard of some kind.

She could feel the steady beat of a small piece of tech in his skull, and a matching pulse from the one in cold sleep. At first she had been alarmed when she had discovered it was a weapon, but further analysis told her it would only destroy his brain, nothing else around him. She was beginning to think she could neutralize it, but wasn't sure he would want that. Until she was sure, there was no sense broaching the subject with him.

The one called Joshua shuffled through the ship, dazed except when he touched her circuits and accessed her libraries. She knew in some ways she was like a drug to him, something that lessened a terrible, gaping wound in him that she could not identify. He threw himself into learning about her. It was strangely gratifying at times, but his rawness made her, in turn feel aching and exposed. She could not help but tune into him when those long fingers ran over her keyboards and linked memory nodes in ways that had never been tried before and together they perused philosophy, art, and more and more often, human physiology, genetics, surgical techniques. He was not a teacher, though. Only a door-opener to the riches she never knew she contained.

And the frozen one? He was Matthew, whose name the towering Joshua screamed in the night now and again. Those times, the dark soldier would rise and perch on the edge of his bunk, bent over as if in great pain. Adam came and stood outside his doors on the nights when the screams carried and echoed in her, his fists clenched, trembling. Sometimes, his hand would rise to the doorframe as if he would enter, as if there was something he could fight off. But then, the energy would fall away, and he would slowly go back to his

own cabin on his silent feet. Killer's feet. Warrior's feet. But also beaten somehow before he could even begin.

Of Matthew's personality, she could sense nothing. He was stored meat, inert, injured. The only thing that interested her, if that wasn't too vague a word, was the mystery of why his name on Joshua's lips cut into her as well, a visceral and unpleasant wound of its own.

So they journeyed, eight months out, only weeks to go now before planet-fall, the four of them, a space whale and three humans, bound to the shores of Earth.

## Chapter 1

The chronometer on the wall clicked up another set of red numbers, and Joshua put his back to it at last, sick of the reminder of time passing so slowly. He fisted his shimmering bedcover, his legs drawn up tightly to his own belly. He should have been up hours ago; he'd set a grueling workday for himself, everyday. Four hours of hard exercise. Twelve hours of study and tinkering with the Ag ship. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Repeat.

Sometimes it worked.

Sometimes he could stay away from the ag-container that held Matthew for a whole day, and fall into bed so tired that no dreams could touch him. The utter blackness of those times was a balm to his bruised heart and mind. Sometimes, it worked that way. But not tonight.

Irritated, he finally sat up, the ever-present cold of the ship swooped around his shoulders and he shuddered. He slipped out of his bunk, his feet automatically finding a pair of crew slip-ons. He ripped the cover off his bed, wrapped it around himself, and started down to the landing bay.

The ship's corridors were narrow, without any outside view ports. He could call up the vistas they traveled through from the bridge level, but even then, the star-streaked space made him nearly ecstatic and threatened to throw him into yet another seizure. He had been bred to be an urban military unit, cut off from any concept of habitats that were not linear and predictable. He'd never walked outside, although on Terrantata he'd seen trees and birds through the glass of the great community dome. Of course, he'd ended up in medbay right afterwards, his brain so drunk on sensation that it took over an hour to bring him back. It was not an experience he went looking for, even though the joy, the sense of expansion and weightlessness and possibility were so very intoxicating. So very right. But also, wholly overwhelming.

He paused by the railing that ran around upper deck level above the yawning mouth of the huge storage bay. Only a few ag-transport parked there, huge shuttles that could easily hold two hundred men each, and the ship itself was no-where near its full capacity. He and Adam had forced the ship to break orbit in order to flee Terrantata before she was fully loaded. That alone would make the port officials on Earth wildly suspicious. He tried to avoid thinking of such things, but the time was fast approaching when they would need some kind of carefully fabricated story that would both get Matthew prompt medical attention and keep them off the Company's data lines.

And that would mean working with Adam, something they'd both carefully avoided for months now.

As always, his eyes tracked quickly to Matthew's shuttle, the one that they had stolen from the planet, the one that held his ag-container in its belly and little else.

Joshua belonged to the man held there in stasis. But more, he loved Matthew, fiercely. In a way, he was happy that if Matthew died, he would follow right after, the implant in his own brain that monitored his proximity to his living owner would kick in and blow him away if said owner's heart and brain activity fully stopped. It had been a terrible chance to even place Matthew in stasis, but it had worked. For the rest of their lives, they could never be more than a quarter of a mile apart or death would separate them, irrevocably. Or at least carve Joshua out of Matthew's life.

Again, in a way, he was glad that it was his brain that held the proprietary chip, not Matthew's. Life without his hazel-eyed lover was unacceptable. He'd committed murder after all, to make sure it didn't happen.

He turned away to the lift that would take him to the shuttle bay's floor. "Base-floor level," he murmured as he entered.

"Aft bay elevator engaged," it replied with a decidedly feminine lilt to its voice. He frowned then, his eyes traveling the clean lines of the little lift to the thumb-sized camera the center of its roof.

"You've changed your voice again," he said as the elevator sank.

"Yes," the lift answered him as if it had not heard the question implicit in his statement. The doors opened, waiting for him to depart.

"Why a woman's voice?"

"Are there not enough men on board already?" she answered him.

Joshua smiled a little. "More than enough. Keep this up, and I'll have to name you."

"I can name myself," the ship replied.

"I'm sure you can," Joshua returned. He stepped out and the doors closed behind him.

He paused there, pulling the blanket more tightly around his shoulders. Why did he do this to himself, walk down here in the middle of the night and try to keep watch over a man who wasn't even dreaming? The sheer inefficiency of it made him uncomfortable. But he was driven—that was the only word for it.

He walked up the ramp, stopping only for a moment just at the top to scan the power panels. Everything flared green and steady. He sighed as he stepped forward, toward the solitary ag container hunkered there, slightly canted from the speed and sloppiness of their departure. As always he put his hand on the cold metal surface, his fingers spread but gentle. "Hey, Matthew. It's me."

"He can't hear you, you know."

Joshua dropped his blanket away from his naked shoulders and spun, crouching low to the deck.

Adam sat just inside the ramp line, shadowed and still. The other man measured him, his pale blue eyes running down his frame in a way that was something more than familiar and just a little shy of hungry.

"Cover back up before you freeze."

"What are you doing here?" Joshua asked him, only painfully allowing himself to come out of his combat mode a few degrees.

"I couldn't sleep again. Like you."

"I'm nothing like you, Adam."

Adam grinned tightly, then purposefully turned his head, as if he were gazing down the ramp and into the open space of the landing bay. "Hope it helps to tell yourself that. Doesn't make it true, though."

"Answer my question. Why are you here?"

Adam sighed and slowly came to his feet. "If you must know, I was trying to work out a story about the frozen man in that ag-container that the port authorities will buy."

Joshua let a little more of his tension leak away. "Really. And?"

"And I'm aware as a soldier I have no fucking idea what is normal operating procedure for unloading a partially full ag-ship inbound from a planet currently experiencing social unrest."

Joshua nodded. "The ship might be able to fill us in."

"The ship? It changed its voice again."

"I noticed," Joshua replied.

"Can't say it makes me comfortable. The little I experienced of women on Terrantata doesn't incline me to be particularly warm and fuzzy about them." Joshua could see the skin over Adam's jaw tighten.

"Yeah. Someone you're supposed to be able to trust trying to kill you, it is a little rattling isn't it?" Joshua couldn't keep the venom out of his voice.

Adam snapped his eyes up, and then tipped his head, acknowledging the verbal stab. "If you are obliquely trying to bring up what happened between us, those were orders. And I am a soldier, even if you can pretend you aren't." He drew his arms around himself. He still wore his black L Group uniform and Joshua could see his fingers gripping at the fabric.

"Right. Because rape is one of the first military techniques they teach us L Groupers the moment we hit puberty." Though he tried to push the memories back, he could feel it happen again, the cords cutting into his wrists as his stunned body struggled to hold his weight, the belt-beating from two other L group soldiers, then Adam taking him hard against his own bed frame. He could feel, too, the belt Adam had wrapped around his throat, choking him, trying to kill him. And then Matthew had burst on the scene, a stranger then, but he'd saved Joshua's life.

Adam's face flushed, his eyes sliding away. "Like I said, orders."

"I remember everything you said to me that day," Joshua snarled, his voice low and furious. "About being in me, about owning me. It'll never go away, Adam, like dirt I can't scrub off. Were those part of your orders, too?"

Adam looked up then, his pale eyes catching the lights. His lips parted for a moment, then he shook his head. "No, you're right. That wasn't part of it. But you know something? I wouldn't take them back if I could. It's all I have of you now isn't it? My words rattling around in your head."

Adam's swallowed, and thrust out his hand before Joshua could even begin to snap back at those words. "No. You let me finish! You left me with memories, too--of being in you, then taking you in my mouth in my apartment before...before the ugliness between us. I'd never felt so complete with another L Grouper. I never wanted you to leave, and when I came out of the shower, you were gone. And I knew, even then, there was no way to kill you without killing myself, despite the orders I had. That was the day you violated something in me, Joshua, left your claws in my brain. You just didn't know it, did you?"

And before Joshua could react, Adam shoved himself off the wall, and leapt over the side of the ramp, his combat boots ringing on the metal floor.

Joshua let him go. It was all he could do to lean back against the storage container and shut his eyes, his fists knotted, the cords in his throat tight and hot.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00I4YT9U6> If you enjoyed this excerpt, you can find the entire book at this link. As always, I love to hear from my readers!

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## **Ambre says**

The first book in this series blew me away. This book is less amazing. It is a good book, but also flawed.

This book flows. Joshua as he tries to avoid the path laid out for him by his creator /father. Unfortunately, he is already on the path unwittingly. This is the first major flaw. There is no reason he should not have been able to figure out that he was walking into a trap. He as given the information necessary to figure it out but just... didn't? This isn't really consistent with his character.

Upon returning to The Company, Joshua finds himself up against several new foes. The author introduces AI as a subject here and I kind of wish she hadn't. It is sort of cliché, to be honest. I liked her exploration of genetically engineered humans, but the AI topic is a little too pat. Additionally, she throws too many obstacles at the protagonist. The plot becomes a circus of bad guys.

The air bad guy is still at work here. He is shallower than he was in the first book. Less addled paper pusher and more pure evil.

And she commits a romance sin I won't give away. I will say that to me, the background was not laid out to make it work.

So in all that, even though it is the continuation of a great story, I would give it 3.5 stars. It needs more focus, and more of the good guys actually figuring things out rather than being victims of their environments. Also, more editing. Like the first book, the editing is poor. Luckily the author has pretty good grammar skills and they are mostly typos.

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