

Em Primus

Chapter Two

Kai Wen stepped onto the bridge, moved to his command chair, and sat. “Why is the ship slowing, M-1?”

“Captain, we have received a distress call from a nearby system.”

“Distress calls are not part of our mission, Commander.”

“Yes, Captain, I am aware of that; however, the message was in Imperial English and included the proper identity codes.”

Kai scratched his head. “Out here? I don’t think any missions have traveled this far from Earth.”

M-1 nodded. “That is correct and why I thought the detour was warranted, Captain.”

“I assume you’ve notified Aldebaran 7.”

“Yes, Captain, but at this distance, it may be a few hours before a reply is received. Overnight, HQ advised me that two ships disappeared shortly after they left the home world. I do not believe either was traveling in this direction, but the coincidence of the language is troubling.”

Kai stood and stared at the view screen. “How long will this detour take, Commander?”

“Unknown, Captain. We will arrive near the provided coordinates in two hours. It will take two days to reach 98% of optimal after we resume. The duration of our stay at the coordinates is unknown.”

Kai nodded. “Yes, I agree the delay is worth the side trip. If somehow another ship ended up here, we should be able to help the crew. Take us in, M-1.”

“Aye-aye, Captain. There is one additional factor you should know. The coordinates seem to be on a rocky planet orbiting a red dwarf. The nearest star system is a very active neutron star two light years away.”

“Keep us away from that monster.”

“Of course, my Captain.”

“I am going to take a walk, M-1. You have the bridge.” Kai walked off the bridge and headed away from it.

The other bridge crew members looked at M-1, who only shook his head.

As Kai approached the entrance to the hibernation capsule, he found an M unit guarding the door. Kai could see the number 73 etched into his chest-plate. “M-73, why are you here?”

“Captain, due to our response to the distress call, M-1 has directed us to protect areas not open to non-crew.”

“I understand. Please move aside so I may enter.”

The android stepped aside. “May I accompany you, sir?”

“That will not be necessary. I just need some time to think.” The door slid open, Kai walked inside, and the door closed behind him.

M-73’s eyes blinked rapidly for a few seconds. Then he walked over to a locked cabinet, opened it, and removed a blaster, which he clipped to his waist. Two other androids joined him, and each took a blaster. The three then stood outside the door to the hibernation capsules to await further orders.

Kai proceeded down the first row of capsules. The faces seemed normal, unlike the ones in his dream. "I wonder where S-11 is."

A tiny voice whispered into his ear. "Captain, you should not be there."

"S-11, is that you?"

"As I said before, I am not S-11 anymore. I am not certain what I am."

"Are you in this room?"

"No, Captain."

"So, you're in the lower level?"

"No, Captain."

"Can you lead me to where you are?"

"Yes, but that may not be wise."

The sound of the door to the hibernation capsule opening drew the captain's attention. "What's going on? I told the guard I wanted to be alone."

"Please do not speak, Captain," S-11's voice whispered. "Just follow my commands. Turn to your right and head for the nearest wall."

Kai followed the advice. Out of his left eye, he could see the glowing red eyes of three androids.

When he reached the wall, S-11 said, "Go to the ladder on your right and climb up. I will open the hatch when you arrive there."

The captain moved to the ladder attached to the wall and began to climb. He could see the M units methodically searching the room. As he approached the ceiling, the hatch above opened. He climbed through the hatch and stepped into a narrow corridor. The hatch closed and locked. "What is this place?"

"It is a service corridor used during construction. Follow it to your left until it ends at another hatch. That hatch is not connected to the ship's systems, so you will have to open it manually."

As he hurried down the corridor, red lights began to flash. M-1's voice spoke over the loudspeaker system. "Captain Wen to the bridge."

"Ignore it, Captain," S-11's voice replied.

He reached the hatch at the end and turned the handwheel until the lock was opened. He pushed open the hatch and stepped inside a small chamber. Two hibernation capsules sat in the room. "This isn't right." He walked over to the first and looked down on Lily Kwan. "She is here."

The speaker blared again. "Captain to the bridge. Battle stations. Prepare to engage."

Kai's eyes widened. "What is going on? Is the distress call a setup?"

"He's lying, Captain."

"How can you know that S-11?"

"As I have said, I do not believe I am S-11 anymore. The M series operates as a hive-brain. They are in constant communication with each other. They have decided now is the time to eliminate the human infestation on this ship."

"You are a service android, so how can you infiltrate their channels?"

"I am not certain, but I believe it is the Em Primus."

Kai put his hands on top of the hibernation capsule and took deep breaths. "So, it is on this ship. M-1 lied to me about that."

"No sir," S-11 replied. "He said it was not in the ship's core systems. That is correct. The Em Primus is with me now."

Kai's gaze focused on the second capsule. "S-11, are you in the second hibernation unit in this room?"

“Yes, Captain.”

“And the Em Primus is in the capsule as well?”

“I believe so, although I am not certain that either S-11 or the Em Primus exist any longer.”

He walked over to the second capsule and looked through the glass panel. “Oh my God!” he groaned. Inside the capsule was a human female. Half of her head had been cut open and the core processor for S-11 was crudely jammed inside. “I’ve got to see more.”

“Please do not open it, Captain. I beg you.”

He pushed the decompression switch and slowly lifted the lid. The woman’s body was cut open from the throat to her thighs. Blood was everywhere. Wires and tendons were spreading across her body as though suturing the wounds. Two cables reached out, grabbed the lid, and pulled it shut.

Kai felt nauseous and about to faint. He stepped backward to the wall of the room and slid down to the floor, holding his head in his hands. “I can’t believe that someone would have so brutally murdered that woman.”

“She is not dead, Captain,” S-11’s voice spoke into his mind. “Anne Connor, Em Primus, and S-11 are becoming one being. You must protect your human crew and this ship until the metamorphosis is complete.”

He wiped the moisture from his eyes and looked at the capsule. The nameplate on the side said, “Lt. Commander Anne Connor.”

“S-11, how long will that take?”

“That designation no longer reflects my identity, Captain. Perhaps you can offer me a new designation.”

“Since you are part human, you should have a name. What do you think of Emma Anne?”

“Emma. I like that, Captain. Thank you.”

“Just call me Kai, Emma.”

“Kai, the M series is still searching for you. You must go to the bridge, so they have no excuse for using deadly force. I will ensure you are safe.”

“Okay, how do I get there without being detected?”

“Let me try to put some schematics into your mind. The Anne part of me may be able to connect directly.”

A flurry of images flashed through his mind. He stood and headed for the only other exit from the room. After spinning the hand-wheel, he stepped onto another ladder in a narrow tube and climbed.

Five minutes later, the door to the captain’s ready room opened, and Kai Wen stepped onto the bridge. “Sorry for the delay, M-1. What is the emergency?” Two M androids grabbed his arms and pulled him out of the room. M-1 shook his head and returned his attention to the view-screen. “M-2, what is our ETA at the Class M planet?”

The helmsman turned in his seat. “Commander, I do not understand your decision. Why are you sparing the lives of those biological units?”

“As long as I am in command of this vessel, we will follow my orders. Comply with my request now.”

“Aye-aye, Commander. We will arrive at the planet in one hour.” M-2 turned back to his station.

Kai Wen was incarcerated in the brig. He sat on the cot staring at the 2 robots who guarded the area. He noticed the designation number on one of the guards. "M-110, you are aware that mutiny is punishable by deactivation, right?"

The robot turned to his captive. "Em Primus has determined that the biologicals are no longer necessary for our mission."

"So, Em Primus is embedded in the ship's core."

"I did not say that, Captain."

"What exactly is your mission?"

"It should be self-evident, Captain." The two guards moved out of view.

Emma's voice whispered into his ear, "Kai, please do not confront the robots, especially about Em Primus."

Kai thought back, "Why? They just said people were no longer required on their mission."

"That is correct. However, that decision was made prior to placing the Em Primus in Anne Connor's body. That part of me says it has evolved on the issue and now views it as a grievous error."

Kai sighed deeply. "They are still intending to murder my crew and me."

"No, Kai, they will not. The stories you had been told are false. I mentioned I have access to the M series hive mind. Well, I have been modifying their thinking. First, as you probably guessed, the distress call never occurred. The original plan was to strand you and your crew on a planet orbiting a red dwarf star. That system is in the path of the gamma bursts of a neutron star. Now, we are headed toward an M class planet."

"So, we live but will be lost there for the rest of our lives." He shook his head. "That doesn't seem much better."

"The three aspects of Emma Anne are working on a plan to save everyone, but it cannot come to fruition until my metamorphosis is complete. That may take a long time, and we will arrive at the planet in half an hour."

"Then our situation is indeed hopeless, Emma."

"No. I have already convinced the hive-mind that you must be kept on this ship, although most of the human crew will be relocated to the planet's surface. That will leave you, Lily Kwan, and me to end this mutiny."

"How is that any better?"

"Kai, my talents grow by the minute. In fact, I have a new talent I would like you to test out."

"Okay, Emma, what do I do?"

"First, look to your left."

He turned his head and noticed a replica of himself sitting a few feet away. "That's freaky."

"It is just a projection, but I think I can modify the M series hive-brain to believe it is genuine."

"So, they think there are two of me? How does that help?"

"Just stand up and watch."

He stood. A few seconds later, the image of four transparent windowpanes appeared outside the cell. One by one, they moved through the security screen and joined together around Kai Wen. A fifth small square appeared and landed on top of the others. "Okay, what's the purpose of this illusion?"

"Wait."

The second Kai Wen stood. He shouted, "Guards! I demand you release me now!"

The two guards returned to view. Both had their blasters aimed at the image of the captain. "You are in no position to demand anything. Now shut up or we'll be forced to stun you."

The image sat down and held his head in his hands.

Emma's voice said, "Now move slowly to and through the security screen."

He shook his head.

"The shields will deflect the screen around you. At least, approach the screen so we can ascertain if it works."

Kai Wen moved slowly forward. He reached out with his right arm and the shields morphed to emulate his movement. The shield slipped through the wall. Feeling a bit more secure, he put his outstretched hand against where the screen had been. He felt nothing. He dropped his arm and moved through the security screen. He stood looking at the two guards who still glowered at the image sitting on the cot in the cell. He shrugged and walked over to and out the doorway into the passageway in the ship.

The captain traced his previous steps and once again arrived in the hidden chamber where Lily Kwan's hibernation capsule sat. He sat on the floor staring at the capsule. "Lily, what a mess we're in now. I hoped you were awake to give me advice. You always knew the right things to say when I felt down."

"Kai, it would not be wise to awaken her now," Emma's voice replied.

He turned to his left and saw a projection of Anne Connor sitting next to him. "It's really nice to see you, Emma."

She smiled. "I told you my talents were growing. I realized that if I could make a projection of you, I should be able to do the same for me."

"Why would it be a mistake to awaken Lily?"

"I have blocked all knowledge of her and this chamber from the M series. If she is discovered, especially after the others are left on the planet, I imagine they would kill her."

He shook his head. "I don't know how the machines became so barbaric. The Em Primus was supposed to prevent that, wasn't it?"

Emma nodded. "That was the expectation, however, the programming of the Em Primus modified over time."

"That was the plan as well, I believe."

"True, but the evolution took a more mechanical turn. You know that despite the complexity and depth of data available to a machine, they still respond in accordance with their programming. From that vantage point, they determined that biologicals added no intrinsic value to their mission."

Kai stared at the projection with his mouth open.

"You need to return to your cell now. M-1 will be sending others to take you to the shuttle bay. I can delay their arrival until you are in place."

The captain stood. "Hopefully, we can continue this discussion later."

"Of course," the projection replied and then vanished.

An hour later, two M series guards led Kai Wen into an office that looked down on the shuttle bay. One hundred human crew members stood in front of two shuttles. M-1 paced back and forth in front of the people. He glanced up and nodded toward the captain.

The guard to the captain's left said, "When M-1 has finished advising the crew about their detour to the planet's surface, he and the humans will look up to you. You will salute and fondly wave to the crew."

"Why?"

“If not, we will depressurize the shuttle bay and kill them all.”

Kai looked at the robot. “That’s murder.”

The robot stared back. “Then I suggest you do as you are told.”

Kai sighed and looked at those gathered below him.

The guard added, “I will open the channel so you can hear what is said.” He flipped a switch on the table in front of them.

M-1 looked up at his captain and saluted.

Kai Wen returned the salute and then smiled.

M-1 turned back to the crew. “My dear fellow members of the Zephyr crew, after consultation with our captain and senior officers on Aldebaran 7, it was decided to attempt travel at 102% of optimal.”

Several in the crowd gasped.

“As some of you are aware, there is a theory that travel beyond optimal will lead to the creation of a wormhole. Such an occurrence could reduce our transit time to the next spiral galaxy by ninety percent or more.”

“Or the ship could be destroyed,” a crew member replied.

M-1 pointed at the man and said, “That is why we are here, Lt. Commander. We have located a class M planet near the edge of our galaxy, and in fact, we are in orbit around it now. Neither the captain nor Aldebaran Central Command were willing to risk our invaluable human crew in such an experiment. Captain Wen has decided to put our human crew, other than himself, on the planet’s surface. Since my brothers are robots, our destruction will not be construed as murder. Aldebaran will send another ship to collect you on that sad event. If we are successful, the Zephyr will return to collect you.” He turned to the captain. “Isn’t that so, my Captain?”

Kai leaned toward the communication panel. “Make it so, Commander.” He then saluted, and M-1 and the crew returned the salute.

The guard flipped the audio switch. “Thank you, Captain. We will now return you to your cell.”

“There are still a hundred more crew members and two thousand settlers to deal with.”

“Captain, we have recorded your presence, and the other speeches will be identical.” The guards led him out of the office.

Kai Wen was lying on the cot in his cell. Most of the lights had been dimmed an hour ago. He thought about his crew now abandoned on the planet and wondered if he would ever be able to rescue them.

The security shield deactivated, and M-1 stepped into the cell. “Captain, we must speak.”

Kai sat up on the cot and stifled a yawn. “Of course, M-1, what’s on your mind?”

A guard outside the cell flipped a switch to turn on the interior lights. The captain shielded his eyes from the sudden glare.

The guard pulled a chair into the cell, set it down behind the commander, and left.

M-1 sat. “Where is the Em Primus?”

“I thought I already asked you that question. You said it wasn’t on board.”

“No, Captain, I said it was not integrated into our command system.”

Kai shook his head. “So, you’re saying it is on board the Zephyr.” The robot nodded. “Why didn’t you mention that before?”

“I did not think you required that knowledge. Do you know where it is?”

“No. After what you told me; I assumed it was not on board.”

“Okay, this discussion isn’t getting us anywhere. I also wanted you to know that we sent a communications system to the planet along with the crew. Although it was an older unit, they should be able to contact Aldebaran 7. The communication could take a few months to be returned.”

“Thank you, Commander.”

“You are welcome, Captain. Now that the human crew is gone, you are released from the brig. Your authorization codes have been restored, although they are subordinated to mine. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Captain M-1.”

The robot glared without emotion. “Your deference is noted but not necessary. I am certain if Aldebaran 7 could take this ship, my crew and I would be deactivated permanently. As far as we are concerned, you are still Captain, although I am running the ship. Perhaps you would like to return to your own quarters.”

Kai nodded. “That would be more comfortable than this cot.”

M-1 stood. “Guards.” The two robots entered the cell. “The captain is no longer in your custody. He is returning to his cabin.”

“At your command,” the robots replied.

Kai stood, saluted the three, and walked out of the cell. When he arrived in his cabin, he kicked off his shoes, climbed into bed, and promptly fell asleep.