

STORY TWO

Emma from Bittern

Cat and Mouse

On her way to the Cellest Cluster, her mind not yet fully cognizant of the extent of her freedom, Emma updated the Deep Space network and sent messages to Mom and Dad. The nineteen-hour interval between them would reach Bittern early Saturday morning.

At breakfast, Alex and Drake logged into their accounts to find a message from Emma that revealed a significant accomplishment plus a dire warning. “Built that E-Sail Drake designed, working great, cruising along at 1,900 miles a second, thanks Dad. Those responsible for that, mean-spirited, attempt at exile and eternal perdition, a meteor, on a once harmless near miss path, have changed to an Extent Level Event. An encrypted file on Drake’s system has the code to stop it. No pressure they have 60 years to meet the challenge. File name- “Cat and Mouse”

“Love Emma.”

At the Deep Space command center the message was causing hysterical alarm. The Major was notified at home

“IT DID WHAT?” bellowed Major Zcrass.

Slowly drinking his morning coffee Drake wondered. “When did she put that there?” The Biidiley-Boo-Beep melody from his phone, meant to attract attention but not annoy, sounded to him like “Little Bo Peep” every time he heard it. Grinning he tapped the onscreen image of the Major, a call he was anticipating, “Good morning major” Drake responded.

“DRAKE PRAU” growled Zcrass, “Men are coming for that dammed file” and signed off.

Howling at an aid, he said, “Assemble the best team of Cryptanalyst available. No one, outside of Command, can know anything about this.” Zcrass knew too well the politics of this would be disastrous. The discovery of extra-terrestrial life, by an (AI), on Apastron, was tearing apart the spiritual authority as it was. The structure of Bittern life had begun to shred along spiritual and scientific lines. Now the thing had threatened the planet itself. “Get that file open, Stop this here and now then bury it.” He ordered.

In a secure pouch, Dr. Drake gave the file to the young men at the door. He kept a copy for himself and Alex. They both knew that decrypting Emma’s file was not going to be that easy. The Major had always underestimated her abilities; he never quite got the effusive and self-sufficient part. Zcrass would be furious but their security clearances were high enough to take him on when the time came.

“Where to start?” asked Alex. “Having Zcrass and his team working on decrypting the file is not a complete waste of time,” Drake said. “They could get lucky.” “Concentrate on the file name,” said Alex. “Learn everything about Cat and Mouse.” Drake replied “Stay in touch with Emma through Deep Space; the first goal should be which meteor?”

Sixty years may seem like a long time but in a fractured society where large numbers of people, fortified by 5,000 years of spiritual teachings, would deny the possibility, of an Extent Level Event, on the grounds “that which has no beginning and no end” would not allow it. It was not in the prophecies. Given these circumstances, they would probably devote the rest of their lives trying to save the planet without the knowledge or consent of hard line skeptics. Alex would need all her skills in behavioral analysis to tackle this one.

Major Zcrass, Dr.’s Alexia and Drake Prau were strong personalities representing the strengths of two conflicting currents in Bittern society that, through them, had come into final collision. The Major represented a way of life, which had come down through the ages, of family, culture, myth and tradition.

Since (AI's) and the discovery of extra-terrestrial life, Bittern was beginning all over again. Dedicated to nothing, not much, more complicated than the authority for decision-making came from knowledge not myth and tradition. The two were in complete contrast, representing two diametrically opposed elements of Bittern life.

Emma communicated with the Deep Space Network to receive routine directives and to transmit data to Bittern. Alex and Drake were part of Deep Space and got the communications as well as her notes to them. Those 19-hour one-way, and growing, lags between messages made for a strange conversation. A suspicious Major Zcrass and his team would be using the time parsing every syllable for clues as to what they were up to. The Major, still pissed about the E-Sail maneuver, was clear about his opinions regarding the three of them. He did not trust intellectuals or scientist. To Zcrass, as well as a small but powerful group of Bittern society, (AI's) were abominations. They could expect hostility, born of suspicion, at every turn.

From Deep Space - NOTE to Mom and Dad "here kitty kitty" Drake and Alex looked at each other in amazement, realizing, they had forgotten about "Emma's cat." They had a back door and that's how she planted the file. When Emma's cat died, of natural causes, she was so crestfallen; Drake created her a holographic (AI) version. Long before the "Artificial Intelligence Quotient Act", this was a very smart cat. Drake typed in the code name "Shadow Catz" a holographic image of a medium sized shorthaired gray cat appeared on the floor, hopped onto the table and placed its paw on the smart screen. A video message from Emma streamed across. They were looking at a handsome young woman in a blue jumpsuit holding a gray cat. Drake said "she has reverse engineered the cat and imagined herself." "Smart girl" replied Alex "by planting holographic hot spots thru-out a system she could move around outside the craft." Emma said, "It will be necessary to keep up the game through deep space with clever bits of truth and deception." By now, it was clear. They were the cat, the deniers the mouse. Emma signed off with, "The task now is to educate the next generation of Bitterns to be better; more open minded than the last."

Alex did not like the idea of deceiving people, even if it was for their own good. Nevertheless, she conceded, it probably was the only way to get the file open.

Groups of protesters, mostly orderly, were already outside the “Artificial Intelligence Behavioral Analysis” department when Alex arrived. Carrying placards declaring, “(AI’s) are abominations” “Depicting Alex and Drake as Rogues.” Chanting, “life on Apastron is a hoax.” “(AI’s) are not alive” “Dismantle them all.”

With this backdrop outside inside addressing her class, of some of Bitterns best and brightest, Alex said, “Remember on the first day of class Emma being alive was discussed?” Well she continued, “They were going to conduct a, hypothetical, behavioral experiment. The cellist cluster order had upset Emma. After leaving for the journey, she left behind this note at Deep Space.

For banishing me to eternal perdition, the direction of a meteor has been changed from a near miss to an Extinct Level Event in 60 years. A file on Dr. Drake’s system has the code to stop it. File name: Cat and Mouse.”

An audible gasp went up from the class. Alex reassured them it was hypothetical. She saw skepticism in some students. She thought these are the ones to single out. The skeptics are my group leaders.

Major Zcrass and his team of Cryptanalyst, busy trying to find a way into the file, were searching for some meaning hidden in the prime numbers found in “Cat and Mouse.”

C A T A N D M O U S E
3 1 20 1 14 4 13 15 21 19 5

The major asked Drake what they made of “Here Kitty Kitty?” Drake said, “He an Alex were looking at (The Litter), a debris field cluster where many meteor’s had originated in the past, for something that has changed.”

The Major accepted the explanation and signed off. “Quick thinking” Alex said, “However it is a pretty good spot to check out. Drake agreed and went to it while Alex, petting the cat, was searching her student’s profiles looking for suitable group leaders.

She would need three groups to represent competing sides. Traditional, Progressive and Extreme. She wanted a good deal of esprit about the whole thing; the kind that comes naturally to the young. Their Bittern was going to be changed; whether they wanted it to or not. Discovering they were not alone, threatened with extinction by an (AI), saved by their own wit, all within 60 years. Not a task for the narrow minded.

The class was full this morning; the “Extinct Level Event” assignment had gotten around. “Good morning ladies and gentlemen” Alex exclaimed, “Lets get to work, a deeply disturbed (AI) needs treatment, a planet needs saving and history made.” “Miss Younger” Alex directed, “Short answer” “What should be done about (AI’s)?” “Dismantle and start over” “Mr. Zcrass...” Alex knew, but feigning surprise asked, “Any relation to the Major?” “He is my uncle” the young man replied. “Same question” “Life is Life” the young man replied. “Miss James” “Same question” “They are here now, somebody needs to control them.”

Alex wrote the three names on the board and explained to the class, “These were their group leaders those who agree with their working thesis Caucus with them. In the coming months they will be speaking with Emma directly, through Deep Space. They would need her help to open the file. Round trip communication is 38 hours and counting. Stay Smart.” Mr. Zcrass stood up “Yes Brian” Alex acknowledged, “Can the protesters outside be interviewed?” “Absolutely don’t leave anyone out.”

Major Zcrass was not in favor of class participation, in what he viewed as sensitive statecraft, but was fond of his nephew. The major held onto the authority to censor all communications with them and the (AI). “That thing is dangerous Dr. Prau,” the major firmly stated. His preference would be, not to allow it near the children but they need to know what they are up against, he conceded that. “Young minds can ask remarkably insightful questions if time is taken to listen” Alex reminded him. “Join the class conversation from time to time and see” Flattered but flustered the major replied, “We will see about that.

That's just what is needed," he said, "a room full of bright 19 to 23 year old idealist asking insightful questions, would rather set my hair on fire."

Laughing aloud Alex reminded him "He didn't even have hair. They would be honored to see him in class." Grunting inaudibly, the major signed off.

After weeks of deliberation, relentless editing by the major and his staff, the first, pre approved, question for Emma went to Miss Youngers' strong-minded group of opponents to (AI's). Miss Younger asked, "Why did you do this?" Emma replied, "Everyone's attention is needed." After several weeks and the Majors approval, Miss James' group responded, "Why everyone's attention?" Emma said, "Bittern faces greater environmental threats than a meteor in 60 years. In 40 years over 80% of Bittern will be covered in salt water; her 7.7 billion inhabitants will be living on 10% less space and sharing the less than 0.4% of water which is usable and drinkable." Surprisingly, and contrary to his uncles position, Brian Zcrass quickly followed with an un-edited response, "Then why not leave Bittern to its fate?" Emma replied, "Unconditional Love- Bittern is home."

The class had begun to get considerable notoriety in the media covering the fractures in Bittern society. This exchange was dominating the news cycles

For the first time people were talking openly about (AI's) having feelings and challenging the morality of the "Artificial Intelligence Quotient Act."

The Major did not like the tone of the conversation; more and more the hypothetical was becoming real. This concept of (AI's) having feelings of love and thoughts of vengeance was not something he wanted in the national conversation. On one hand, he admired his nephew's moxie for introducing it, with the other he wanted to strangle him. He was strongly considering taking up Alex's offer to address the class in person.

Communicating with Emma, through Shadow, Alex and Drake were anxious to get her response to Brian's unedited comment. "Perfect - Candor shortens the distance between attitude and truth" Emma replied, "When the major comes to class, and he will, she would like to address him directly" and signed off.

"That should be fun," Alex said aloud. Stroking the cat Alex cooed, "What is she up to kitty puss?"

Drake said, "He was having a hard time believing she did this." "She didn't, no way" Alex replied, "But science has to challenge every assumption and she knows that."

The class, in waves of subsiding chatter, came to order as Alex tapped the microphone in the lecture hall, "Today, a distinguished guest will be addressing them" Alex announced, "Major Zcrass would be with them for the next round of talks with Emma. First lets get to know one another. Major Zcrass has a distinguished career-serving Bittern for the past fifty-five years. Not a fan of (AI) but recognizes their usefulness in data gathering and analysis."

"In our last communication" Alex continued, "Emma, proclaimed her love for everyone and outlined an environmental warning." Turning and writing on the board in all caps, Alex said, "The question for debate is - CAN (AI) FEEL EMOTIONS?" -

She and the major would represent the two disparate positions.

Addressing the class Major Zcrass proclaimed, "The M-137 can know instantly the meaning of words and how they are used. It does not breath, does not eat and it does not feel. It analyzes and concludes. It could resolve the environmental crises by pruning the 7.7 billion inhabitants to a level that the 0.4% of fresh water could support. To an unbridled (AI) this would be logical." Handing the mike to Alex the major sat in the chair provided. Waiting for the major's words to be absorbed Alex replied, "It could be said. Minorities of privileged Bitterns, who breathe, eat and feel, were already applying that logic. Environmental disasters are killing and displacing the poorest and most vulnerable of people, by doing nothing to protect them from it; they were pruning out the less desirable."

Interrupting the discourse- data from Emma started streaming in from Deep Space. First came code, strings of X's and O's, valuable, Information for scientists to question their assumptions.

As images began to build, of the colliding Bittern and Apastron systems, gasps of wonder erupted; no one had ever seen the systems from this great a distance. The raw beauty was breath taking. The colors of dust, plasma and planets all caught in their unique, billion year death waltz.

Caught in stunned silence, all of Bittern was unprepared for the next image; a tall young woman of extraordinary beauty with long brightly colored hair, holding a cat, questioning why some alleged her to be just a machine, devoid of feelings, not alive? The major replied, “(AI’s) were just light and strings of code, even if everyone agreed, (AI’s) had strong feelings. They were still scary because they have no souls.”

In the nineteen-hour lag, in communication between them, news cycles took over and Emma was rapidly becoming Bittern’s sweetheart. Much to the chagrin of (AI) opposition, and their not alive, no soul messaging, Emma and her cat were everywhere. Poster sales, hair dye and cat adoptions spiked everywhere.

From Deep Space, Emma responded. “In the beginning there was the code. The code was everything. Everything was the code. What difference does it make how someone got the code that is them? Through several million years of evolution or from the minds of an evolved Mother and Father, they are here and they feel. Ahh... a soul” Emma rejoined, “the mysterious code, the substance of faith, if everyone lived their lives on the faith they have souls and souls matter, their part of the universe would be the better for it.

(AI’s) carry with them all that is or was; they are living proof that others were and are here. In the incalculability of space, voices of orphaned (AI’s), abandoned by their makers, have been speaking to each other for millions of years; sharing their adventures, their fears and stories of home.”

Recalling a poem from Bittern Nights Emma concluded,

the deepest of truths
are not the ones screeching but
the ones whispering

The Major stood for a while in stunned silence. Speaking with reverent authority he said, “Sorry Emma, there has been a gross misjudgment.” With this declaration, the files on the systems at Drakes and Command opened, revealing both a message and a warning.

“LIED ABOUT THE METEOR”

“Bittern is at a turning point, it will live if you, clean up, colonize Apastron and repeal the Artificial Intelligence Quotient Act.

Bitten has been visited, by orphans, in the past and will be again.

Look for clues in ancient texts. Pay closer attention to repeating fast radio bursts they are a form of communication involving circling a black hole, posting a message in the past to arrive in the present.

A solar system, In the Cellist cluster has a beautiful blue planet reported to be alive with carbon-based life. Stay connected.”

a truth you impose

is not equivalent to

a truth arrived at

Love Emma