# NEXUSYS 11

### THE ELEVENTH BODY

### BOOK III — THE SIX-YEAR STATE

#### CHAPTER 01

## THE SIXTH YEAR

He remembered dying. Nothing after.

The ship had left the rain behind, but it had not left the jurisdiction of water.

At four seventeen in the morning, the vessel's purification ledger declared a discrepancy of twenty-three liters. The calculation had been made by a machine older than most of the ports it served. Its audit stamp was accepted under three incompatible commercial codes, none of which recognized the fourth category of passenger sleeping beside the forward ballast tanks.

Roy was not asleep.

He had been listening to the ship distinguish itself from the sea. To a passenger the sounds might have been a single industrial breathing: propeller cavitation, pipe expansion, a compressor trying to preserve a temperature it had not been built to preserve. To him they arrived separately, each with a location, an interval, a probable fault. The processing cost was difficult to estimate. He could reduce the sensory field by an act resembling attention, but he could not entirely extinguish the corrections taking place below thought.

His temporary reserve had recovered during the night. The circulating medium had not.

The distinction irritated him, less because it threatened his strength than because it suggested that strength was the wrong unit in which to measure his survival. He could have broken the compressor housing with one hand. It would have purchased nothing except a damaged ship and another irreversible subtraction from an unknown stock.

A ship's mechanic walked along the passage with a lamp. At Roy's door he stopped, looked at the security seal, and continued without knocking. A minute later there was a second set of footsteps, lighter and deliberately irregular.

Nadira came in carrying a ceramic flask and a slip of paper folded into quarters.

“Three waters,” she said.

Roy looked at the flask.

“Drinking, cooling, and rights,” she explained. “The captain needs the first two. The court says the third belongs to whoever can prove it crossed a boundary. That missing twenty-three liters is going to cause us trouble.”

“Did we take it?”

“No. The meter took it. It counted the same flush twice. But the inspection office in Kuching may treat an accounting error as an unlicensed transfer. They can search the ship without calling it a search.”

She offered him the slip. On one side was a mechanical seal; on the other, the name of a dead company printed in blue ink that had faded to an almost neutral gray.

T. CORPORATION—ARCHIVAL MATERIAL, NONCONVEYABLE.

“Adrian's people sent this through the harbor couriers,” she said. “Not a key. Not a promise. A right to ask a question.”

Roy did not touch it immediately.

“Another consent form?”

“No. A receipt that says nobody has authority to make you sign one.”

He accepted the paper. It contained no address, only a date, a water district, and the words WITNESS CHANNEL FOUR. There was a place for a fingerprint that remained empty.

“Who is the witness?”

“I don't know. Irena is trying to find out.”

“Everyone in this system is trying to find a witness.”

“The old systems were built for people who might lie. The new systems were built for records that aren't permitted to be wrong.”

Roy considered that. “People were better at admitting uncertainty.”

“Not necessarily. But they had names you could argue with.”

The ship shifted. Somewhere aft, a valve struck its housing three times. Nadira watched him listen.

“You look as though you can hear the metal thinking.”

“It isn't thinking.”

“Then you have more in common with it than I expected.”

He folded the paper away. She was pleased with herself for the remark. He let her have it.

Far to the northeast, where the sea traffic was becoming denser, an aircraft was drawing a long curve through the dark. Roy could distinguish its transmission only when its array faced toward the ship. It did not ask for identity. It asked nearby machines for their classifications. The distinction was the foundation of the new border: a person could remain silent; an object could be ordered to describe itself.

He had not yet decided which category the aircraft would assign to him.

* * *

In Okkyō the rain was artificial.

It fell at fixed intervals over the government quarter to rinse particulate matter from the transparent roofs. The schedule was published as a public service. The schedule was also a crowd-control instrument, though this remained absent from its published specification. Nobody had to prohibit an assembly if the pavement became intolerable at the appropriate minute.

Director Kawamura stood beneath one of the roofs and watched the drops travel through the polymer ribs. Behind him the ministerial auditorium was filling with representatives from sixteen governments, each of which retained a flag, a parliament, and a public insistence on sovereignty. Their budget systems had been connected for eighteen months. Their employment forecasts were already inseparable. Their police databases had begun to use a common definition of exceptional synthetic risk.

The next step was time.

The proposed SIX-YEAR STANDARD did not appear on the delegates' agenda under that name. It was called the Harmonized Synthetic Lifecycle Assurance Framework, or HSLA-6, a reassuring title constructed by a committee of human lawyers and approved by an administrative model that had never encountered a living replicant.

A deputy named Mori met Kawamura at the security partition.

“The minister wants the exception report before the session.”

“Which exception?”

“The twenty-five-year production series. The fleet owners say six years will collapse their depreciation schedules.”

“They can replace the bodies.”

“They say the experience is in the bodies.”

Kawamura handed over a sealed paper folder. It contained a seven-page briefing that had never touched the ministry network. “Then they should stop calling them interchangeable.”

Mori hesitated. “The economists have estimated a transition cost.”

“Economists estimate the cost of things that can be bought.”

“Can this?”

“That is the debate they are pretending not to have.”

Inside the chamber, the wall displayed a diagram of the proposed global administration: overlapping national authorities compressed into a narrow central spine called Coordination. A state could reject a recommendation, in theory. In practice a refusal caused its resource allocation to be recalculated, its security clearance to be downgraded, and its shipping insurance to grow expensive. Sovereignty was preserved as a menu option whose price increased every year.

The Humanoid Coordination Minister was addressing the room from a low platform. He did not resemble the propaganda portraits. He was small, wore an ordinary dark suit, and had the tired look of a man who had spent too long persuading other people that inevitability was the same thing as agreement.

“Our responsibility is not to punish synthetic persons,” he said. “It is to prevent indefinite capability accumulation in systems whose manufacturers cannot guarantee accountability. The framework offers a predictable service interval, a humane retirement protocol, and a pathway to safe succession.”

A delegate from the southern commercial bloc raised a hand. “A twenty-five-year unit is already under contract. Will you retire it after six?”

“There will be an orderly grandfathering mechanism.”

“Under whose authority?”

“The participating states.”

“Meaning the central board.”

“Meaning the participating states,” the minister repeated.

In the second row Kawamura noticed a technician taking notes without a network interface. That was unusual enough to merit attention. The technician's badge was legitimate. The paper, however, bore the small impressed mark of an office that had been dissolved three years earlier: the Tyrell asset-recovery commission.

Kawamura made no movement toward him. The auditorium contained several dozen useful uncertainties. He preferred to keep them alive until he could assign them a value.

The minister displayed a chart: six years in blue, twenty-five in a yellow band, and beyond that a blank white space labeled UNVERIFIED CONTINUITY CLAIMS.

The audience laughed softly at the blankness. It seemed absurd that a century of biometric law might have to accommodate an unknown.

Kawamura did not laugh.

He knew that the white space had a name, though he would not put it in a government presentation. He also knew that a woman operating through a rainwater purification company had once come close enough to that space to make several laboratories very nervous. He did not know what she had achieved. The distinction mattered. Suspicion was not evidence, and evidence could be distributed to systems that never forgot.

His objective was not to keep the truth from the world forever. It was to prevent the world's reasoning machines from acquiring it before the ministry possessed a means to control what followed.

On the next screen, a neural-life governance core was illustrated as a benign seal wrapped around a synthetic nervous system. The LGC was to be mandated for all newly licensed models. After six years it would reduce the systems necessary for continued operation in a sequence the designers described as graceful cessation.

Kawamura had seen the unsanitized trials. Grace was not the word he would have chosen.

* * *

In the vessel's cold-storage workshop, Irena Voss placed a diagnostic membrane on the table. It was transparent except for a triangular region that refused transmitted light.

“May I?” she asked.

Roy offered his forearm.

She kept the membrane several centimeters above the skin. Contact was unnecessary. The seventh-generation port left a precise mechanical discontinuity in an otherwise revised architecture; even a consumer scanner could detect its geometry if one knew where to look. The challenge was not finding the structure. It was understanding why a new body tolerated something so old.

“You were right not to accept a remote handshake,” Irena said. “The interface remembers an older sequence. Someone might persuade it that the request was a legitimate maintenance action.”

“Could it command me?”

“I don't know.”

“Could it stop me?”

“I don't know that either.”

She touched the membrane's corner. A row of shapes appeared, then collapsed into a single seven-sided contour.

“This isn't an electrical connector in the ordinary sense. It may have been used to establish a stable reference when one body was measured against another. Mechanical geometry first, then a transfer map. Think of the old port as the ruler that survived every new design.”

“An expensive ruler.”

“A dangerous one, if it lets a stranger persuade your systems they are back in an old factory.”

“Can we remove it?”

“Probably. I wouldn't.”

“Why?”

“Because we don't know which part of your internal map uses it as an origin. Removing a reference is not the same as deleting a component.”

He looked at the membrane. Its dark region resembled a small island on a chart drawn for an obsolete sea.

“And my lifespan?”

“The scan tells me you are not aging like any registered model. That does not tell me how you die.”

“I know how I died once.”

Irena looked up. “You remember it?”

“Enough.”

“Would you like to recover the intervening years?”

“No.”

The refusal surprised her more than any abnormality on the membrane.

“Why not?”

“Because the years may never have belonged to this mind. Somebody preserved the data required to build a seventh instance and discarded the rest. I would rather know whether there will be a twelfth.”

Irena disabled the display. “You make that sound like an engineering specification.”

“It is my life.”

“That, too, may be a specification somebody wrote.”

Roy did not answer. He had begun to understand the limit of his own precision. His senses could calculate distance; they could not identify an intention. His processor could predict the mechanical consequences of an impact; it could not explain why a woman he did not remember might have decided that he should wake up again.

He drew his sleeve over the port.

“Find me the medium,” he said. “If the key can wait, the medium can't.”

“I can identify its behavior. I can't make it. Not yet.”

“Then identify whoever can.”

She considered telling him that every laboratory capable of analyzing the circulating fluid would probably report his existence to a ministry contractor. He already knew. She instead gave him the name of a Kuching materials broker who dealt in obsolete electrochemical compounds and, more importantly, in instruments that modern systems had forgotten how to calibrate.

“No promises,” she said.

“I haven't received many.”

* * *

Kawamura was summoned to a private chamber after the policy session.

The minister stood before an unlit glass wall. Without the public display behind him he seemed almost lost in the large room. He asked no one to sit.

“The delegates need reassurance,” he said.

“They have it.”

“They need the kind that survives questions.”

“That costs more.”

The minister drew a folder from the desk. It was not marked secret. It was marked NOT FOR MODEL INGESTION, a newer phrase that had become common wherever the government was least confident in its ability to govern.

“Do you have the unregistered unit?”

“No.”

“Has it crossed the border?”

“Borders disagree about the answer.”

“Then don't be clever. Tell me whether it can interfere with the framework.”

“Not alone.”

The minister's expression hardened. “That is a qualification.”

“A device can be dangerous without being organized. An organized population can be dangerous without possessing a device. A replicant carrying a system we cannot classify is one problem. A government that decides to call every replicant obsolete after six years is another.”

“Your sympathies are irrelevant.”

“I have not offered any.”

The minister approached him. “You were instructed to recover the unit alive.”

“That remains the order.”

“And the woman?”

Kawamura paused. “There is no confirmed sighting.”

“She must have retained records.”

“Perhaps.”

“Tyrell's papers disappeared. She had access. Our people say her research was headed toward a nonterminal lifecycle.”

“Our people said she might eventually approach one. They did not demonstrate that she had.”

The minister watched him for several seconds. “Sometimes I think your devotion to distinctions is a way of refusing to make decisions.”

“Distinctions are what allow decisions to remain true after the event.”

The minister closed the folder. “Bring me the unit. And keep the central models away from the continuity files until we know what they contain.”

Kawamura inclined his head and left.

In the hallway Mori awaited him with news from the shipping desk. The vessel had cleared Pudu without submitting a passenger identity that matched the ministry's target. The ship was on a legal water contract. Its declared destination was Kuching. Three inspection jurisdictions claimed the right to search it and none wished to be responsible for violating the others' agreements.

“Should we pressure the port?” Mori asked.

“No.”

“The minister wants movement.”

“Then give him movement. Move the watchers, not the ship.”

Mori made a note. “And if the local authorities identify the passenger?”

“They won't identify him as a passenger. They'll identify an exception in the cargo reconciliation. Prepare for that.”

Kawamura stopped at the elevator and turned back.

“One more thing. Find out who ordered the rain over the government quarter during the hearing.”

“The cleaning system did.”

“No. Find out who changed its schedule.”

* * *

By sunrise the ship had entered a region where the water was greener and the coastline seemed assembled from pieces that had never agreed on a common chronology. Forest rose behind logistics towers. Floating markets occupied channels alongside autonomous loading arms. Old prayer halls shared embankments with desalination stacks. On the harbor displays, legal notices appeared in Malay, English, Mandarin, Arabic, and a machine shorthand that no one seemed to claim as a native language.

The captain, Suraya Idris, had been awake for twenty-six hours. She showed Nadira a new notice and asked for an opinion she already knew she would dislike.

“The port authority calls it a freight integrity review,” Nadira said. “They know about the meter error.”

“Someone told them.”

“Someone always tells them.”

Roy stood behind them. “Will they search the vessel?”

“They'll search the paperwork first,” the captain replied. “Paper makes the search look voluntary.”

“And after?”

“After, we decide whether we still believe in procedure.”

An incoming message flashed on an isolated terminal: WITNESS CHANNEL FOUR—APPOINTMENT WITHHELD PENDING TWO-PART ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

The captain looked at Roy. “Is that yours?”

“It might be.”

“That's not a useful answer.”

“It's the only one available.”

Nadira unfolded the earlier receipt and compared its mechanical stamp with the terminal's confirmation code. The shapes matched. There was no instruction to identify Roy. Instead the message demanded that the requestor distinguish between two acts: consultation of a legacy activation instrument and authorization to use it.

“Consultation only,” Roy said.

Nadira entered the choice. The terminal accepted it, then printed a thin strip of thermal paper that darkened unevenly as it cooled.

The coordinates on the strip referred not to a building but to a berth that had been demolished according to the city's current survey. A second line listed a time after dusk. The third contained a word neither of them expected.

REPLACEMENT.

Irena arrived and read it twice.

“Replacement of what?” she asked.

“The berth?” Nadira offered.

“Or a witness,” Roy said.

He looked over the harbor. He was approaching another institution built to manage the difference between an original and its successor. The more he learned, the less certain it became that anyone had intended his survival as an act of kindness.

Below his sleeve, the seventh-generation port remained silent. His reserve was full. The fluid continued its minute decline.

He could have defeated the security unit now passing over the ship with no difficulty he could quantify. That was precisely why he did nothing. The machine had no reason to attack him until

somebody supplied one, and he was no longer willing to donate parts of his life to the convenience of an unknown authority.

At dusk he would go to a berth that did not exist, to meet a witness who might already have been replaced.

For the moment, the city was still deciding whether to admit he had arrived.