

Last Star 103

Star XXXIV ~ Requiem ~ Part V

Sari agreed to help Avi and her friends reach the top of the city, where another concert was scheduled. They were supposed to join Sari's technical crew and soon received the official passes, then joined her in her team's van. It traveled to the esophagus, then directly to the 'gullet', and then turned to the spinal cord, which led it to the 'cerebellum'.

In this place, the entire roof was made of layers of synapses, which continuously lit up and went out, causing the surroundings to shimmer as though in the glow of neon. As they walked along the sidewalks of glassy enamel, Avi looked at organic wires beneath the tiles, observing how points of light flashed towards the nerve-made trees, climbing their trunks and twigs – the latter often were tuned by the workers, who looked like levitating brains in jars.

The palace, where Sari was supposed to perform, was hidden behind a garden of bloody roses. Their vines climbed along the walls made of transparent jelly full of blue nerves. Those vines retracted whenever someone came closer, revealing a path illuminated by vesicles with golden fluid.

At the end of the path, there was an interface shaped like a bracelet. Sari put her wrist inside, causing the nearby vines to move, reaching for her open palm. A thorn emerged from one of the tendrils and stabbed Sari, taking a sample of her blood. The jelly then moved aside, revealing a long corridor of dripping slime.

Luna summoned umbrellas made of light above her companions, then, once again, telekinetically lifted the boxes with equipment, pulling them behind her.

“Everything will be okay.” - Sari quietly uttered to herself, then entered.

The transparent jelly was soon replaced by wrinkled walls of brain tissue, which finally led to a spiral staircase winding around the nerve cord. Higher, above the translucent steps from pastel-pink enamel, a few thousand small lights could be seen.

Step after step, Sari climbed to the stage, her heart beating nervously.

“Luna. It's very important to me.” - Sari uttered quietly.

“I know.” - Luna assured. - “Configuring this equipment is trivial, so everything will be fine. You have my word.”

When Sari was at the top of the stairs, the semitransparent ceiling, which was also the floor of the stage, moved aside. The main platform was separated from the guests only by curtains parallel to a one-way mirror, and behind them, in an oval room as large as a small stadium, were countless brains in jars, their nerve endings connected to advanced sound-enhancing interfaces.

Above them, in suspended VIP boxes, inside tubes of green liquid, there were people who resembled a winged nerve system with a flattened brain, dozens of blue insect-like eyes, and multiple antennae.

Luna carefully placed the equipment and, at the same time, scanned the guests. She wasn't moving at all, focused on telekinetically connecting the cables.

"I think I was able to figure them out." - Luna finally spoke.

"Did you find Akel?" - Virka asked.

"I'm not sure if I've found him, but when everyone is grouping in this location, it makes it easier to notice that their intelligence signatures are connected with a central unit, and I can approximate its position." - Luna explained. - "I can hide our presence, just as I did on Goliath, and we'll sneak in."

"Can you do it before my final performance?" - Sari asked.

"I promise, we will." - Luna assured.

"Well. I wish you good luck, then." - Sari said. - "I'll be waiting for you."

The concert didn't seem to influence the number or position of guards, and the majority of them were still where they were supposed to be, watching pulsating tunnels. It didn't matter because Luna easily sneaked past them and past the patrols. The deeper she traveled into the brain, the thicker the nerve tissue grew, until it formed a dark-blue river of intertwined fibers.

“Is it still far?” - Avi whispered to Luna once she made sure their group was alone.

“No.” - Luna spoke in a normal voice, confident in her silencing abilities. - “The central nerve node should be underneath us. I can feel its presence.”

“Underneath?” - Avi asked, slightly surprised.

“Yes.” - Luna confirmed. - “This place allows the easiest access. If we were to enter via the front gate, we wouldn't be able to avoid guards.”

“...but I don't see any path here.” - Avi uttered. - “How do you plan to get inside?”

“That's the biggest problem.” - Luna sighed. - “I plan to spread the tissue underneath us in a way that won't damage the nerves, but it's merely the first obstacle.”

“What's the second one?” - Virka asked.

“The nerve endings here are very sensitive. They'll detect our intrusion for sure.” - Luna informed. - “I can easily make it through on my own, but to take you with me, I'll have to be more careful.”

“So, will you reveal your plan to us?” - Nicolas replied.

“There's a technique that I haven't tried yet.” - Luna responded. - “After my rebirth on Goliath, I was granted access to a few new tricks. To be precise, I'm now able to manipulate space to some degree. I can construct a tunnel, which from the outside will be as thin as a single thread with two wider funnels, and from the inside will be as wide as one person.”

Virka raised her eyebrow. - “Is there a catch?”

“I'm doing it for the first time. I didn't have time to experiment. Everything is based solely on precise calculations.” - Luna revealed.

“Do you try to say that there's a risk?” - Nicolas asked.

“No. I'm confident in my abilities.” - Luna replied. - “However, if the impossible were to happen, which I assure you – it won't, then the tunnel may become unstable and re-expand, which will start an alarm.”

“Just that?” - Nicolas uttered. - “We won't be crushed or become stuck?”

“No. The tissue is too soft for that to happen, and the tunnel is made out of solid light. It's an extension of me. It's not something that can be manipulated by the pressure, no matter how strong it would be.” - Luna paused for a moment. - “So... any volunteers?”

Nicolas looked at his companions, and before anyone could raise their hand, added. - “I'll go first.”

After everyone safely landed on the second end of the spatial construct, Luna turned into a point of light and safely crossed between the tissue, then illuminated the dark room.

Next to the walls of a dome made of brain matter, there were a few supercomputer units connected to a few bundles of thick cables, which covered the entire floor. Their endings disappeared inside a deep vat, in which a wrinkled, convex shape was floating.

“Akel.” - Luna spoke. - “What did they do to him...?”

Virka wasn't sure if she understood Luna. - “Are you trying to imply he was put in this state on purpose?”

This story originates from a different website. Ensure the author gets the support they deserve by reading it there.

“He's in artificial coma...” - Luna answered. - “...but his intelligence signatures aren't natural. They turned his psyche into a powerful calculating unit.”

“It doesn't sound good.” - Virka commented.

“To do something like this to a living being...” - Luna muttered. - “They have no conscience.”

“...but can you revert it?” - Charlotte asked with compassion.

“No. I've no experience with fixing this kind of modifications of living beings.” - Luna replied. - “I haven't got enough knowledge to do it.”

“What now?” - Nicolas asked. - “We came here only due to him.”

Luna knelt next to the vat, studying the main access terminal. - “I can wake him up and isolate what's left of his intelligence signatures, but I doubt that he'll answer coherently.”

“Every shot not taken is a wasted shot.” - Virka repeated Avi's phrase. - “Isn't it true, Avi?”

Avi nodded. - “Luna. Please, do it.”

One after another, Luna removed the cables from the terminal and connected them to the sockets below. Next, she entered the commands which lowered the level of brain fluids in the vat, revealing most of the monstrous brain, which now slowly pulsed as if it was breathing.

When the subsequent logs filled the screen of the main terminal, Luna studied them thoroughly. She knelt, then began to move the cables aside until she found a thick, loose ending with a sound-

compatible interface. She interted it into the last free socket and the room was soon filled with a muffled and pained voice, which, at irregular intervals, struggled to catch its breath.

“Let's give him a moment.” - Luna requested as she waited for the brain to calm down.

The previous noise soon stopped, replaced by a series of three shallow breaths. The gap in the frontal lobe grew wider, revealing a white, spherical shape covered in mucus. It was a single eye, its pupil shrank due to Luna's light. Gradually, it observed the entire room, as if the brain-person tried to figure out where it was, then it looked at the intruders.

“I don't remember.” - Akel spoke. - “I don't remember! I don't remember! There's only pain. Why?”

“At least he's speaking...” - Virka commented. - “...but I don't feel he'll tell us much.”

Avi approached the eye, pitying the brain-person and feeling sad for them. - “Your name is Akel.”

The brain stared at Avi's face, trying to read her intentions. - “Akel. I remember. Akel, yes. You, however, I don't know.”

“My name is Avi, and this is Luna.” - She then pointed at others. - “Virka, Charlotte, Nicolas.”

The brain spoke in an exhausted voice. - “Many names... I can't remember them all. I'm Akel. That's what I need to remember.”

“Akel. I know you barely got to know us, but if we can help you somehow, please let us know.” - Avi replied.

Akel's eye moved back slightly. - “Help?”

“Yes.” - Avi confirmed. - “Your people are using you. They hurt you a lot.”

Akel froze. He seemed to fall into a trance lasting a few minutes. Still, Avi wanted to give him time.

Luna, however, was sceptical. - “Let's give it a rest. We're only hurting him more. We can't save him with our current knowledge, and it's not why we are here anyway.”

“Luna!” - Avi protested.

“Avi. I'm not heartless, I also would like to help him...” - Luna clarified. - “...but I'm judging our situation with logic. We should focus on things that can be done.”

The brain regained awareness, then said. - “No. My people, I serve them.”

Avi crouched next to the eye. - “Serve? Akel! It's inhumane! They'll completely ruin you!”

"They need me." - Akel responded.

"I don't think you will be able to persuade him." - Virka added.

"He's sacrificing himself." - Nicolas commented. - "The only question is, why."

The eye turned to Nicolas. - "My people... blind. I must protect them."

"Protect from what?" - Nicolas asked.

"Protect from..." - Akel uttered right before falling asleep again.

"Will he wake up?" - Nicolas asked after ten minutes of waiting.

Luna was examining the logs displayed on the screen. - "It looks like he's decompressing his memories. It'll take a while." - Luna sighed. - "We have to choose our question carefully, otherwise it may take forever."

Akel woke up again. - "Protect from... soul sealing."

“Soul sealing?” - Virka asked. - “And what would that be?”

Akel looked at her. - “She... fights against new life. Sealed souls are synchronized in each of her rebirths.”

Virka stomped her feet. - “Be clear!”

Akel took a deep breath. - “Time...for us, it's like a line, but for her, there are many lines, and she lives in parallel, in each of them, able to decelerate and accelerate timelines on whim. For us, these lines can exist one after another, as the cycle of rebirths. For her, there are only synchronized and dead timelines. Dead timelines are those where she won and waits for the end of all things... the synchronized lines are those, where the soul's past life is unique, its choices the same until a specific point. By sealing souls, she prevents branching of timelines... she prevents new lives from desynchronized souls.”

Luna stood as if she were nailed to the ground. Avi approached her and nudged her with her elbow, then asked. - “Did you understand anything?”

“This contradicts everything I've ever believed...” - Luna whispered. - “...yet, it explains a lot.”

Avi stared at her as if she were expecting an explanation.

“A universe-wide desynchronization as a process determined by the spectrum of soul desynchronization.” - Luna spoke to herself. - “The soul isn't an indivisible construct, but rather a bundle

of fibers... if each of them can create new lives... then the infinity engine must be the only constant point, which links all the world together. Interesting... but is it of any use to us?"

"Luna!" - Avi interrupted her loudly.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Akel is just saying that there exist many parallel worlds, and the new ones can be created at any moment. I don't know what the mechanism behind this is, but a single soul can multiply and make different choices in different worlds, as separate beings. The Witch tries to prevent it by sealing souls..." - Luna turned to Akel. - "...but why?"

Akel was resting for two more minutes. - "I think you are already aware."

Luna was pondering for a moment. - "It's easier for her to fight on fewer fronts, but why? Are her powers limited? How much of a difference can one unsealed soul make? Hm... a system of communicating vessels. Sealed souls can't desynchronize a timeline, but will still give birth to new ones if they are influenced by an unsealed soul... unless, hmm..."

"Do you have a hypothesis?" - Nicolas asked.

"I do." - Luna admitted. - "The Necrosis exists to prevent this. Perhaps it also seals the souls. I have one question, though. Akel, can you explain – how did you protect yourselves from Universal Necrosis, when your Eltri is already dead?"

"She... she did it... she gave me. Gave what? What?" - Akel spoke. - "We were supposed to wait. For her... no, she wants us dead. Why? Didn't we..."

“Akel, focus!” - Avi begged. - “Please.”

Akel's eye hid again. Fifteen minutes passed, then another fifteen. When the eye returned, Akel spoke. -
“I don't remember.”

Luna looked at the logs. She wasn't pleased. - “He's overheating. We have to let him rest.”

“One more question!” - Avi interrupted.

Luna raised her eyebrow. - “That might negatively affect him.”

Akel was panting heavily, yet he suggested. - “Ask. I know... I know.... I don't remember, but ask.”

“Do you know why the Witch is doing all this?” - Avi asked.

“The infinite being in a finite world...” -Akel explained. - “...betrayed and alone. Her eyes should be allowed to see more than the same black canvas. Her ears should be allowed to hear more than the same eternal silence. Without mother or father, or home. Now, her heart is an infinite empty well, and none of us can restore it.”

Avi looked at Luna, as if asking for another explanation.

Instead, it was Virka who answered. - "If she can manipulate the time however she wants, and if she lives in many worlds at the same time... then assuming she had some goal, she already had tried everything or almost everything. I can't imagine it, but think a bit – there might be more worlds than there were combinations of atoms in our entire universe's existence. She had to live through the same events countless times. It's torture, and she looks for a way to escape."

Luna sat down, burying her face in her hands. - "It's all pointless. What can WE change?"

"If there are that many worlds, then all it takes is for a miracle to happen in one of them." - Avi uttered quietly.

"If it didn't happen yet, then the chance is close to zero." - Luna countered.

Akel interjected, his voice still exhausted. - "I remember... her first title... Witch of Miracles." - then fell asleep.

Luna slammed her hand against the terminal, at the same time activating a cooling-drugging fluid supply, then shouted. - "Curse it! One miracle won't be enough, we need millions!"

Avi wasn't losing hope. - "I.. I know it's possible. I met you, I have my parents again, we saved Goliath, and we helped a lot of people. Do you think it's all just an accident? Our world is the world of miracles."

“No, Avi.” - Luna uttered. - “It's all a matter of chance. Even if there's a universe where someone succeeds, other universes still will be dead. What's the chance that our universe will be the one to survive this trial?”

“I know that if there's another Luna and Avi, they'll be fighting to save every soul.” - Avi assured. - “We have to give our best, because they surely are giving their best, too.”

Luna spoke in a faint voice. - “You should know that I'll follow you wherever you go.” - Although she still sounded resigned.

Avi smiled to comfort her, then extended her hand to her to help her get up. - “We made an important step forward today, a few more and we'll surely paint a new picture – a one that was never seen by any infinite being.”

“After hearing all this, you're still surprisingly confident.” - Virka noticed.

Avi shrugged. - “I simply believe that even if there are infinitely many lottery tickets, and all the ones that were already pulled are black, then there still can exist a white one.”

“I won't explain the basics of probability to you. You have always been bad at math.” - Luna sighed.

“...but she has never been lacking faith.” - Charlotte added. - “Life is more than statistics.”

“I won't argue.” - Luna uttered. - “Sari is waiting for us, and I promised her we'll return before her song.”