

Last Star 111

Star XXXVII ~ Unravelling ~ Part III

In the morning, Luna's spaceship headed to the monastery. Despite a heavy blizzard blocking the view, Luna could read from her scans that the terrain mostly consisted of sharp mountain peaks, and the monastery was located inside a large recess below one of them. Shockingly, even if it was difficult to fly here, it didn't stop other guests from coming, because some other spaceships had already landed on the platform outside the walls.

Once Luna's ship touched the ground, Avi dressed in her winter clothes and ran outside, way before Charlotte could prepare, and way before Luna could finish analyzing the place. The monastery was huge, and half of it was located in the hollowed mountain rock. Outside, there were over a dozen smaller objects, with one almost as large as the main monastery building itself and shaped like a letter L.

After reading the wooden signs, Avi could deduce the purpose of nearby structures. Closest to her was the orchard, which shocked Avi, because she was confident that no plants could be cultivated here. A bit farther away, there was a school and student hostel connected to an inn, where other visitors could consume a warm meal or also find a room.

When Charlotte and Luna walked outside, they joined Avi and immediately entered the inn to get some information. Most of the tables were unoccupied, which indicated it wasn't lunchtime, and also that the visitors had better stuff to do than idly sitting next to the fireplace.

Avi ordered mushroom casserole for everyone and asked the barmaid about when the guests usually come, where to ask about Eltri, and where people like her can study soul manipulation. She learned that there were still four hours until lunch, that she could learn about Eltri from the prefects of five paths, and that she could join meditation classes in the afternoon, and that she would be trained by monks known as 'Keys'. The barmaid also mentioned their large library, which was the L-shaped building, and pointed out that if they want to gossip later, they can wait there until lunch hour.

Avi discussed the news with Luna and Charlotte, deciding that they would follow the barmaid's advice.

Luna discovered thousands of soul-related books in the library. She also learned about the history of Elri and about the development of its patronage. There were also scrolls that taught the basic techniques related to control of spiritual energy and a few documents that indicated the existence of forbidden, taboo practices.

Underground, there was also a secret library for members of the monastery, which Luna discreetly tried to scan. Still, after doing that, she noticed that every book was empty for some reason. A moment later, Luna was also approached by a monk who explained to her that she wouldn't be able to bypass their security, but still asked her not to try.

Upon hearing this, Avi crossed her arms and gave Luna a disapproving look.

"Fine, fine. I'm sorry." - Luna said, more to Avi than to the monk, and when he left, she added - "Eh. Most of their books won't help us. It's a bunch of mystical mumbo-jumbo."

"Mumbo-jumbo? You're saying this after what we've been shown?" - Avi replied.

"Eh." - Luna sighed. - "Don't ask me to explain these books to you. It'll only give you a headache."

“You didn't find anything useful for novices?” - Charlotte asked. - “There should be some simple stuff.”

“I don't know... I learned that contrary to Akel, they believe that soul is a monolith...” - Luna explained. - “...and they explain its fragmentation with an unknown miracle of change – a strong non-spatial distortion.”

“Who is right, then?” - Avi asked.

“Most likely, both of them.” - Luna informed. - “If we were to explain the process of the universe's desynchronization in relation to souls to them, then we would classify it as the effect of the birth aspect, but I suspect it's more like a superposition. They are aware that our choices change the nature of the soul and describe it as a weave of interactions – that is, conversation – with a 'spectrum of potential', that is, one of planes of a meta-world, where the souls originated and where they are suspended.”

“...okay...” - Avi uttered.

“You didn't understand anything, did you?” - Luna wanted to confirm.

“I understood... a tiny bit.” - Avi denied.

“Eh, I don't blame you. Without their philosophical context, it's hard to explain specific concepts.” - Luna said, then added. - “Still, I feel that they limited their learning potential. Their treatises about Eltri indicate that once you 'link' with a patron, your soul is automatically sealed and becomes a monolith, which restricts soul abilities.”

“What does it mean?” - Avi asked. - “That linking with a patron is a bad option?”

“I've never said that...” - Luna spoke. - “...but the capabilities of the soul are strongly related to the aspect of conversation. It's due to the interaction of souls, or their temporary union, that miracles happen. Of course, there are exceptions, but they're related to very strong souls, such as patrons. There really aren't many exercises that can be practiced alone. However, there's an alternative to spiritual conversation with a patron. One can theoretically form a large cult that would focus on a single goal... but the effects are often negligible. Also, by forming a closed pact, you would limit your ability to have spiritual conversations with souls that aren't members of your cult.”

Avi was pondering. - “Hmm... so, I won't be able to talk with my twin soul either?”

“It likely will be made more difficult.” - Luna informed. - “That's why you should finish your practice and take care of unfinished business before considering meeting with Eltri.”

Did you know this text is from a different site? Read the official version to support the creator.

“Thank you, Luna! That knowledge is really useful!” - Avi said.

“I'm glad I could help.” - Luna smiled gently.

“What about Eltri?” - Charlotte asked after a moment. - “Do you know where to find it?”

"It's more complicated. We'll have to visit the school of five paths." - Luna revealed. - "Eltri here... its core lives beyond our spatial dimension. There are gates that can grant us entry, but they won't let anyone in and often change their location. It wasn't always like this. It started after Eltri began growing larger."

"We are one step closer!" - Avi exclaimed zestfully.

Later, their conversation became more casual. Luna taught Avi the first breathing exercises and mentioned what would be required of her during the meditation lessons, while Charlotte was browsing the contents of books related to herbalism. Once Luna noticed that monks began to leave their private reading rooms, she informed her mostly-busy friends that it was time for lunch.

Despite the tavern being more crowded, about half of the tables were still unoccupied. At first, Avi ordered three mulled beers. Although the inn didn't accept credits, she had a few coins, which she received for helping villagers. When Avi observed the guests, she recognized one of the clockmakers, concealed under a white cloak, sitting alone. At a nearby table, there was also a pair of cuddling crystal beings. One was a wide, two and a half meter tall man with a crude, pointy appearance. The other one was a Tanzanite woman half his size, with gentle features and a smooth silhouette. In the middle of the tavern, four silicon spheres hovered in the air. Their surface was so polished that one could see one's own reflection in it. Then, next to the fireplace were three anthropomorphic bunnies, which were soon joined by a steam machine and two water elementals. Opposite to them, next to a wall, a few different aliens were sitting. They had pink translucent skin and long, vestigial spikes, and were discussing something fervently. Two worms sat behind them, lifting their bowls with tentacles and licking them clean.

"So many different species." - Avi was awestruck. - "I don't know who we should talk to first."

Luna put her mug down. - "They must be here for similar reasons to ours. You'll get a chance to know them better later."

"I don't want to wait!" - Avi replied.

"If you're serious about your meditation practice, then you should regenerate strength." - Luna pointed out. - "Being forced to sit hungry, doing nothing for a few hours, is a bad idea."

Avi pouted, but she had to agree. She looked at her coins, then ordered three lunch sets with cooked carrots, a bowl of groats, and penne pasta filled with melted cheese. After they finished their meal, Avi counted her coins again and sank into her chair.

"Are you sad because you can't afford a dessert?" - Luna guessed.

"Yes." - Avi stated bluntly.

"I can always synthesize a few coins on our ship." - Luna suggested.

"That would be dishonest!" - Avi protested. - "They were working hard to earn their meals, and we didn't."

“Okay, okay! I was joking anyway!” - Luna said. - “I'll try to find a job when you're meditating. I'm sure they need some help.” - She looked at the visitors. Some were already leaving. - “I wonder where they are heading.”

Avi raised her hand, waving to a pink-skinned being who was about to exit the building. - “Excuse me!”

“Yes?” - The man answered.

“We're here for the first time and we wanted to talk to someone experienced.” - Avi explained. - “As long as we don't take too much of your time.”

“Oh, no worries. I can stay here for a few minutes more.” - The alien said and sat next to them. - “How can I help you?”

“Eee...” - Avi began to think. She didn't have any questions prepared.

Charlotte was trying to salvage the situation. - “We're interested in the exercise routine. Could you tell us more about it?”

“It all depends on your goal.” - The pink man spoke. - “Most people here are looking for spiritual enlightenment, so they can aid their people on their home planets, or ark-ships. You need to understand specific records to understand the lectures, but if it's too hard, it's possible to arrange a consultation with an assigned mentor.”

"What about spiritual abilities?" - Luna asked.

"That's... a niche topic." - The man uttered, intrigued. - "May I ask, why are you interested in something so impractical?"

"I have a twin soul." - Avi revealed.

"Oh... that explains a lot." - The man said. - "...but I can tell that I'm talking to a single person. Are you a nomad?"

"No." - Avi denied.

"Does that mean that your second half is unsealed?" - The pink person asked. - "Did you subdue it, or is it dormant?"

"I don't know, but I would like to know." - Avi informed.

"Hmm..." - The pink alien was deep in thought. - "I could try to talk to her, but I think it'll be safer for everyone if you contact the Keys."

"Okay! I'll do that!" - Avi promised.

Luna raised her brow, asking the stranger. - "You can talk to souls?"

"It's pretty simple. It requires opening your soul..." - The alien spoke nonchalantly, waving it off. - "...but unfortunately, the monks here aren't too open to the ideas unrelated to the patronage, so they dismiss the risks related to that action."

Luna felt that the matter was getting complicated.

"Of course, if it's only about talking to your twin soul, then you have nothing to worry about. That doesn't require opening one's soul." - The alien added.

Luna didn't want to have gaps in her knowledge. - "You mentioned risks. Can you elaborate?"

"In theory, opened souls can be easily attacked spiritually." - The monk said. - "Curses, possession, mutilation, domination, separation, coma, or even death are possible."

Luna sighed. - "Avi, you should give up."

The alien apologized. - "I didn't want to scare you. In practice, you rarely meet people who practice the dark arts. I also never heard about evil patrons. Although hostile spiritual beings are a different case, I don't think you will meet them, unless you want to."

“What about cults?” - Luna asked. - “Aren't they dangerous, too?”

“Cults?” - The alien spoke. - “Too disorganized, untrained, and small. Even if they were to perform a ritual, they can at most cause a few flowers to wilt in their neighbour's garden.”

“Still, there can be dangers we don't know about.” - Luna added.

“Luna, give it a rest.” - Avi uttered. - “You always worry too much. Think about the benefits.”

“I do think about them...” - Luna stated. - “...and I can tell that for you, it's nothing more than curiosity and entertainment.”

Avi crossed her arms, feeling offended. - “Not at all! I'm serious about it. You just don't accept that I can do something that you don't want to learn!”

The pink alien interjected. - “I don't want to interfere in your private matters, so I'll leave that discussion to you. Although if you ever want to learn how to close the soul properly or repair it, then do visit the Northern Lily.”

“I'll remember.” - Luna stated bluntly. - “Knowing my friend, she's surely going to get into trouble.”

“Hey!” - Avi protested, but Luna didn't care at all about it.

Their conversation continued for a few moments more and was mostly about Eltri. Still, the alien couldn't help them and only repeated the information that Luna was already aware of. By a random chance, they changed the topic, discussing the events of the latest beast attacks on local caravans...