

# THE LAST STAR

Star IV ~ Bubbles

The fourth star bathed the spaceship in a golden light, orbited by a smaller, white dwarf.

“Report, please?” - Avi requested, gazing afar.

“One inhabitable pseudo-ocean world – no signature of sentient life, and one space anomaly.”

“Can you tell me more about the ocean world?”

“Scanning... the liquid forming the planet's surface has a high temperature and a chemical composition similar to soap solution. As a result, the planet produces floating rainbow bubbles of various sizes, which usually rise high in the atmosphere where they burst into rain.”

Avi's eyes sparkled with excitement. - "And the anomaly?"

"Aspect of destruction, decay of order and space. It's hard to make scans. I advise cautiousness."

Avi's face became gloomy. - "Another danger..."

"We don't have to fly there."

Avi waved her head. - "We will get as close as you deem it safe, I want to look at it at the very least."

"Affirmative. What should be our first destination?"

"The soap planet."

Luna registered the instructions and activated a short-jump module. The ship reappeared between a gathering of bubbles, some as small as a pea, others a few hundred meters large.

Avi, delighted, glued to the window and watched the boiling ocean. - “There is nowhere to land...”

“I’ll look for an adequate spot.” - Luna said and re-scanned the planet, then accelerated her spaceship, piercing all the bubbles in her way.

“Hahaha!” - Avi laughed. - “Fly in the big one! Fly in the big one!”

“As you wish.”

The soap giant burst like a rainbow rain. Avi wouldn't stop laughing and pointing at the largest of bubbles, and Luna steered the ship according to the girl's whims until there was a stone column emerged from the ocean in the distance. It was unusually smooth and cylindrical in shape.

When the spaceship landed, Avi equipped her helmet and ran outside. Luna followed in her spherical form.

One by one, Avi burst the bubbles next to her until she arrived at the cliff.

When Luna noticed that her friend was looking down, she asked. - “Avi?” - It wasn't apparent what could grab the girl's attention so much.

“Luna, you said that this planet is inhabitable, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then, what is it?” - Avi pointed down.

On the side of the column, there was a steel balcony with a small landing platform.

“Another sign of intelligent life forms.” - Luna was worried. - “Do you want to investigate?”

“Yes, but this time, let's be more cautious. No splitting up.” - Avi pondered for a moment. - “Let's return to the ship and send our Scout.”

“I like your idea.”

Avi activated the robotic bird when the girls returned to the cliff, and she steered it to arch down the wall. It landed on the platform, its keen eyes directed at the cavity inside the stone. Its interior was illuminated by white floor lamps, and deeper in the room, there were tanks with filtered fluids, all joined together with tubes. In the rear, there was also a single terminal next to a hammock to its right. Slightly in front of the makeshift bed, there was a hibernation pod that served as a refrigerator. Another important structure was a giant furnace, likely used to smelt the metal ores.

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“It... doesn't look dangerous in there.” - Avi said, still checking the camera feed.

“Should we go there?”

“Yes.” - Avi summoned her cell, then reshaped it into wide wings.

“I see you are mastering it in no time.”

“I still don't like it, but I have to admit, it's quite useful.” - Avi replied. - “Do you think that my idea will work?”

“No.”

“Ehh.” - Avi resigned and moved the cell back to its container. - “In that case, all that's left is the climb.”

“Your idea can work, but it requires skill and training. If you learn to glide, it should be enough, but I don't think you can do it successfully on the first attempt.”

“You're not kidding, right!? I could fly!?”

“We'll find an adequate planet to train it together.”

Avi's face lit up. - “Amazing! But now, do you have other ideas?”

“Look around you.”

Avi figured out what Luna means and created a transparent sphere around her body.

“Close, but not close enough. It has to be larger and the bubbles float not only due to heat, but also due to the gases inside them.” - Luna explained.

“That explains a lot.” - Avi said and sent the cell to drag one of the bigger bubbles to her and let it inside her sphere. She freed the gases, then warmed the surface under her feet.

“I wasn't aware you could do that already.”

Avi smiled proudly. - “I'm a fast learner.” - When her sphere slowly started floating up, she started to walk inside it to change its direction of movement, then decreased the temperature so it would slowly fall down. - “Luna! I'm levitating!” - Avi grinned.

“Congratulations. It seems I was wrong.”

Avi giggled, then looked below her feet and cautiously descended onto the landing platform. She let her cell-balloon burst, then entered the strange cave.

“Luna, how do you think, what is all of that stuff?” - Avi asked, looking around.

“Personal refinery.” - Luna said as she flew to the tanks. - “It was used to manufacture some sort of lubricant that I can't identify. I would need time to analyze it, but it seems to only be a component of a more complex item.”

“Do you think that we should scan it in case we need to synthesize it later?”

“Surely. It won't hurt.”

Avi nodded and opened the valve, then scanned the dense, yellow fluid. -

“What else is here?” - She said as she walked to the refrigerator. -

“Impossible...”

“What did you find?”

“There are large eggs inside... and some kind of pink milk, I think.” - Avi replied as she scanned the contents. Her hand opened a small side compartment. - “Wait... is that a chocolate pudding?”

“If the ingredients are at least a bit like the ones in your book, then we unlocked a lot more recipes.” - Luna commented.

“Yes...” - Avi whispered in disbelief. - “...if they are fresh.”

Luna flew closer and looked. - “They are.”

“Would that mean... that there is intelligent, biological life out there!?” - Avi had a wide smile. - “Our journey gained meaning!”

“Your happiness is my happiness.”

Avi closed the fridge, then hurried to the terminal, and it wasn't protected at all. It was as user-friendly as her computer back on Earth, so she could browse files quite efficiently.

Six photos of space stations appeared on the screen, all except one were crossed out in red. Avi examined each image, but she couldn't find any extra notes. - "Luna, any ideas?"

"The position of the stars in the background indicates their location."

"Where is the nearest station?"

"In this system, inside the anomaly. It's on the second image." - Luna pointed at a cuboid with a red number zero-four and an array of advanced antennas on the top. It was made from three joint modules, and the two at the bottom were separated from the upper one by the vacuum.

"In that case, let's go there!"

"Avi."

"Yes?"

“It's inside a nether anomaly.”

“I don't understand that term, you have to explain.”

“The aspect of nether, or destruction, is one of the eight fundamental forces of the universe. Everything related to it is dangerous and can lead to death.”

“Do you mean, we shouldn't go there?”

“The station is in the epicenter of the anomaly. If this is a trap, it may be our last trip. Do you still want to go there?”

“If you advise against it... let's find another station.”

“I advise against it, but there is an alternative.”

“What's on your mind?”

“I was thinking a bit about our... sightseeing, and I think we should do it remotely, like we just did with the Scout.”

“You want to send him... to outer space?”

“Precisely. I only need to strengthen the shell, install a signal enhancer, and scanners.” - Luna said and observed her thoughtful friend, adding. - “What do you think?”

Avi sighed. - “After our encounters, I believe it's a sensible compromise... even if I would prefer to experience it from up close.”

“I'm happy that you agree.”

“How long will the upgrade take?”

“Just under four hours.”

Avi approached her steel bird, lifted it up, and stared at its eyes, whispering. -  
“I'm counting on you.”