

Last Star 135

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part VIII

After a quick lunch, Avi and her companions met Chad and his family, which included his younger brother and parents, and then headed straight to a tent where they could sign up for the treasure hunt. The participants were divided into two groups, each consisting of four members, and both teams received different maps with hints, ensuring there was no competition between them.

The younger group, that is Chadack, his brother, Avi, and Luna, received the resort's map first, together with a small, locked chest and four photos. There were no other rules, and you were allowed to ask other friends or hotel employees for help.

Shai put the chest inside his backpack, then rolled up the map and held it under his armpit while looking at the first photo. It showed a wooden Galleon partially buried in sand and surrounded by palms.

Shai had no idea where the place was, so he showed it to Chadack, then the girls.

“Hm. I could amplify my data collecting ability and scan the entire resort.” - Luna suggested. - “I'll find that place right away.”

Avi wasn't happy with the idea. - “That would be cheating! No scanning!!”

“We can write a post on the treasure hunt subforum.” - Chadack suggested. - “They don't give answers, but provide useful hints instead.”

"No!" - Shai was against it. - "No hints!"

Chad laughed. - "Fine, fine. Although I'm worried the search may take a while."

"Hm. I can check all the brochures related to resort attractions..." - Luna suggested. - "...but I assume that would be cheating, too. Eh?"

"Sounds fair to me. It takes time to read it." - Chadack replied.

"No, it doesn't! Luna is faster than a computer!" - Avi warned.

Luna giggled. - "Well, well... what other kinds of handicaps are you going to give me? Will you tie my arms and ask me to walk completely blind?"

"Only if it's necessary." - Avi said. - "We'll do it the human way, so you must limit your abilities to our level."

"How about I just not interfere and simply observe?" - Luna suggested.

"No. It's a team game!" - Shai protested.

Luna smiled at him. - "Aye, captain!"

"Captain?" - Chad repeated, so Shai would definitely pay attention to it.

"Every pirate crew needs a leader." - Luna added. - "Shai, would you like to take that role?"

Shai silently nodded, agreeing. Apparently, he was still too busy examining the map. Chad and the girls let him think without interruption, and only then did Shai raise his eyes and notice that everyone was waiting for him, but wasn't sure what he was supposed to do.

"Any orders?" - Luna asked.

Shai focused and pointed at the map. - "There!"

The crew leaned over the parchment to check where they were heading. It was the viewpoint at the top of the highest hotel...

"Well, well..." - Luna whistled, impressed. - "They set this place up quite nicely."

A few guests were swimming in the pool, while others were talking in the palms' shadows, holding drinks. Behind them, there was an unattended DJ booth. However, what caught Luna's attention was a single hotel girl with leather pants, a blue vest, a white shirt, and a red bandana. She also kept a wooden sword and toy pistol at her belt, and next to her was a large, closed chest.

"Do you think it's related to the contest in any way?" - Luna asked her crew.

The hotel employee noticed that Shai was holding a map, so she smiled at him and waved friendlyly. -
"Lasha, explorers! Come!"

"Lasha!" - Shai shouted and ran to her. When he was close, the pirate girl opened the chest, took out a spyglass, and gifted it to the boy.

"Not bad, not bad. They know how to organize things." - Luna praised.

Chadack lifted Shai and put him on top of his shoulders, so the boy could look around freely. - "There! There! I see it!!" - Shai shouted a moment later, pointing.

Avi and Luna approached the balustrade. A jungle path led to a small amusement park, and at its center, there was the Galleon.

"High-five!" - Luna called Shai, who grinned and slapped her hand.

After taking the elevator down, the crew found the path pretty easily and followed it, only to find a new pirate employee waiting for them.

“Lasha! Lasha!” - The pirate called and encouraged Shai to come closer with a hand gesture. Once Shai was there, he received four tickets that granted the access to the Galleon. He thanked the pirate, then, all smiles, ran back to his friends and presented his booty.

Chadack looked around the park, then commented. - “Not that I have anything against it, but I'm pretty sure their strategy is to lure us in and make us spend a few credits, haha.” - He peeked at the girls to see their reaction and immediately realized that Avi was more excited than even Shai.

“I was never in an amusement park!!” - Avi exclaimed. - “We've to try everything!”

“Hm, if you want, the treasure hunt can wait. We don't have to complete it today.” - Luna wanted to calm Avi's excitement.

[I want to see it, too! I want, I want, I want!!!] - Eva exclaimed to Avi.

Avi puffed out her cheeks and crossed her arms. - “We should let our captain decide.”

“Oh... you sly fox. You aren't playing fair.” - Although Chadack liked the idea, he still teased Avi.

Shai looked at a glass dome with bumper boats inside and shouted. - “Chad! Chad! Look!”

“Yeah, I see it.” - Chad replied. - “I'm sure it will be fun.”

Shai nodded energetically a few times, and the decision was made...

The crew of self-proclaimed pirates was checking different attractions one after another. They rode a few simple carousels, joined a pendulum ride, water rides, a magic show, and a roller coaster. Weary after all the playing, they eventually chose to sit on a bench. When Luna ordered cold drinks, and Shai was trying his luck at the claw machine, Chadack received photos from his parents, who seemed to enjoy tasks at a pottery club, and then boat sailing. They've also left a message: 'Halfway done'.

“It seems we're really far behind.” - Chadack commented as he was showing photos to Avi.

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Avi wasn't hiding her frustration. - “We'll get ahead of them! I'll make sure of that!”

“Hey, hey. It's not a race.” - Luna said as she returned, four large cups levitating around her. - “The only thing we should care about is completing our tasks before the evening, but considering our current speed, I'm not too optimistic.”

“Shai!”- Chadack shouted. - “Our drinks are here!”

Shai didn't pay attention to him because he was too busy trying to move a plushie trapped between the claws. However, the toy slipped out and fell in the middle of the machine, then rolled to the glass in the back. Angry, Shai walked away and grabbed his drink, then sipped it, completely silent and in a bad mood.

“Don't stress, these machines are a little rigged.” - Luna said.

Shai drank some of his juice, then asked Chad. - “Can you win it for me?”

“It seems we'll spend here a bit longer than we wanted.” - Chad commented.

“Well, then leave it to me.” - Luna suggested, then teleported to the machine. She examined it, saying. - “Two attempts, that's all I need.”

Shai put his cup away and joined Luna, his eyes glued to the glass. - “The purple one!” - He pointed at a three-armed octopus-like toy. On the first attempt, Luna unstuck the mascot, and on the second one, she carefully positioned it above the pile. When it dropped, it rolled straight down to the chute.

Shai smiled brightly as he collected his prize, which he promptly hugged. He then shyly looked at Luna, and upon seeing her gentle, inviting expression, hugged her, too.

"You're welcome." - Luna uttered as she ruffled the boy's hair.

"Luna is good with children." - Chad noticed, then mentioned to Avi. - "Shai already likes her."

Avi was sipping her drink through a straw. - "I'm not surprised. Luna is great at everything."

"Sounds improbable." - Chadack said. - "Surely, you both complete each other, creating a perfect team."

Avi was deep in thought. - "Maybe... but usually when she needs to depend on me, I make many mistakes that I regret."

"...I don't think Luna minds it, does she?" - Chadack asked.

"No, she doesn't..." - Avi answered. - "...but I still can't forgive myself. If I were at least half as good as her, I would've never made them."

"You set high standards for yourself." - Chadack commented. - "It proves that you care a lot."

Avi emptied her cup. - "I must care." - She replied with determination. - "We have only one life and I don't want to waste mine or hers...especially hers."

"That's a serious resolution." - Chadack uttered. - "Does Luna see it the same way?"

"I don't know. I think she tries to enjoy every shared moment we were given..." - Avi answered. - "...but I would like to have more of these. I would like them to never pass."

"I think I understand." - Chadack said. - "I also would like some things to stay forever."

When Luna returned with Shai, she could tell the atmosphere was different. Still, her gentle smile made Chadack and Avi forget about their short but honest chat.

"So? Are we ready to face the waves?" - Luna asked.

Avi got up with enthusiasm. - "Of course! No sea monsters will scare us!"

"Chad?" - Luna asked him, too.

Chadack laughed. - "With such a phenomenal crew? Always."

Shai smiled at everyone cheerfully and shouted - "Board the enemy deck!!" - then hurried to the Galleon.

Another hotel girl was waiting next to the ship, but this time in a sailor uniform. After scanning Shai's tickets, she bowed deeply, inviting everyone inside and saying. - "Have a good voyage."

Shai rushed to the door on the side of the Galleon and found himself under the deck, where rows of electric torches led him to a large chest with pirate swords, toy laser pistols, and vests.

"Oh, it looks like it'll be fun." - Chad commented as he inspected the foam sword.

Shai wasn't waiting for anyone. He hurried to the stairs, shouting. - "To the deck! Raise the sails!"

Luna teleported to him, while Avi and Chad slowly followed. The hatch behind them closed, and the spectacle was about to start. Galleon rose from the sand and began rocking as if on the waves. Around it, a holographic screen appeared, displaying ocean waters. Shai had fun steering the ship, at least until the weather effects in the form of virtual rain and lightning got his attention. Now, there was another ship on the horizon, and it wasn't a friendly one.

Lamps on top of all the props lit green, and Luna called. - "Captain! Cannons are ready!" - It made Shai leave the helm and join them.

The boy grabbed the handles, aimed and fired, sinking the first ship.

“Did you see!? Did you see!?” - The boy shouted as he hopped happily.

“Can you watch Shai?” - Chadack asked Luna when more pirate ships appeared. - “Avi and I will take care of the other side.”

“Avi does better when she doesn't have to coordinate her vision and movement.” - Luna informed. - “Are you sure you two can handle it?”

Avi crossed her arms, pouting. - “We can! It's one hundred percent sure!”

Chadack was holding his laughter. - “Hopefully, you'll do better than you did in our darts game.”

“What a nice team. To make fun of your buddies! Who would've thought!?” - Avi grumbled. - “I'm leaving, you smarty-pants. We'll see who gets a better score.”

Chadack smiled at Luna knowingly, and Luna shrugged and smiled back, then joined Shai. The assault of the enemy fleet was intensifying, making the game harder each second, but not to a point where it would be unbeatable or too difficult. The enemies gave up after a few minutes, but then the deck was covered by a pale-green mist.

Shai was disoriented, so Luna gave him a hint. - “Hm. I can hear some movements below the ship. Captain... there are five of them, No! Over a ten...”

Hearing this, Shai pulled out his sword and pistol, exclaiming. - "To arms!"

Soon, skeletal arms began climbing up the ship's sides, and many skulls appeared with them, their eye sockets glowing with ominous, green fire. The battle for Galleon was about to start...

When the attack of ghastly undead pirates stopped, Avi was already out of strength. She leaned against the mast and sat down, commenting. - "I hope it's over."

Chadack, instead, was warming up his arms. - "Nothing is certain, but a short break wouldn't hurt."

"Oh, you both are so delicate." - Luna joked. - "No fighting spirit at all."

"It's easy to say when your cheat codes are always active." - Avi complained.

"I'm just built different." - Luna said with a confident smile.

Chadack peeked to check the helm, where Shai was. The boy was maneuvering between holographic rocks and was still full of energy. The ship tilted and rocked more than it had so far, because of towering waves and the intensifying storm.

Suddenly, the Galleon was struck as if by something massive.

"Ugh. I think Shai is struggling a little with these rocks." - Avi commented.

There was another collision, strong enough to make one fall.

"No. It's not rocks." - Luna warned. - "Shai! It's below us and it's large!"

The boy let the helm go and joined his crew, his pistol ready.

"Again!? I don't have the strength anymore!" - Avi complained as she got up.

Some water splashed the ship from the left side, revealing a big holographic tentacle with claws. It hit the ship's wooden floor with a loud slap, causing it to shake again. Without a second thought, Shai attacked the monster with his sword, causing the tentacle to retreat into the water. Unfortunately, it was merely the foreshadowing of what was about to come. The deck tilted upward by about ten to fifteen degrees, and before its bow appeared the armored head of a lobster, with two more tentacles beside it...

"Aim for the eyes!" - Luna shouted as she leaped to hide behind a pile of barrels.

Chadack shot from his pistol, but he missed. - "It would be easier if there were less shaking."

"Phi... and who can't aim now?" - Avi commented, resting at the bottom of the mast.

"You could at least be somewhat helpful and take care of tentacles." - Luna replied. - "They are rocking the ship."

"What for? You will always hit the target." - Avi argued.

"So you want me to ruin the fun now?" - Luna scolded her. - "Move your lazy butt. You landlubber!"

"What...?" - Avi got up and protested. - "Fine! If that's what you want! I'll show you how a true sailor handles things!" - She rushed ahead, but a tentacle swiped across the floor and hit her feet. Indicators on Avi's vest grayed out, and a timer appeared on her chest, counting seconds to her revival.

"Oh, no! We've lost a crewmate!" - Luna laughed.

“Wait. One hit!?” - Avi shouted. - “That's unfair! They're not attacking Shai at all!”

“It's a matter of skill.” - Luna joked, still giggling.

“My turn!” - Chadack ran ahead and predicted the attack that knocked Avi out. He jumped over the tentacle and managed to get to the middle of the ship, where he handled the tentacles that were holding it.

“Good job!” - Luna congratulated, then joined him and Shai. Together, they defeated another group of the monster's limbs and quickly approached its head. - “Avi, how long until you're no longer dead?” - Luna asked.

“Eh, give me five seconds.” - Avi said and ran to the crates that were protecting her team.

“You and Chad will provide covering fire, while Shai and I try to get to the bow.” - Luna suggested. - “Remember to aim for the eyes.”

“Good luck.” - Chad replied.

The laser rays illuminated the mist, while Luna gracefully defeated a tentacle after tentacle to help Shai safely get right to the top of the ship and deal the final blow. When the sword pierced the holographic beast, there was a loud roar, after which it retreated to the water. A scoreboard appeared, giving overall and individual results that described the number of defeated ships and pirates. Shai was very happy with his first place and, as they were leaving, kept talking about how he had enjoyed the sword combat.

After the crew made it out of the ship, the sailor woman greeted the heroes once more and informed them that they would be rewarded for defeating the Kraken. She gave a medal to Shai, then revealed the first number of the treasure code to him. Everyone thanked her for the fun and headed to the amusement park's exit, inspecting the second photo at the same time.