

Last Star 148

Star XLI ~ Slowly Euthanasia ~ Part IV

Avi's abilities proved to be enough to reconstruct the links of the ordered weave. Although a few hours had passed, and Avi was beginning to lose her strength, she still coordinated her efforts with Luna's, and Axila's healthy soul served as a reference image.

When the surgery ended the next morning, Avi collapsed onto the floor from fatigue, falling asleep almost instantly. Luna took care of their patient, keeping him in a drug-induced coma until she decided that whatever Avi and she blindly did would be stable.

Around noon, the patient zero opened his eyes for the first time. Axila judged how responsive he was by asking a few standard questions, and also made sure to see if the man remembered his name and what he was doing before being transported to the hospital. The patient introduced himself as Jorr, an asteroid miner, who had just returned home.

Axila looked at Luna, hinting at her suspicion, and unsureness whether Luna should be here when she continues the talks. Ultimately, she decided that keeping secrets would hamper the investigation. She didn't want to miss anything crucial.

Luna analyzed Jorr's physical state and deduced that the growths don't replicate anymore. Despite this, Avi still made a mistake during the surgery, which removed Jorr's mobility in his right leg.

Jorr didn't care about it at all. - "I already worked in mines enough." - He said. - "With a permanent disability, my insurance should cover the early retirement in hot, amethyst springs."

"I wouldn't count on that as long as the city is quarantined." - Luna pointed out.

"Eh? Is the situation this bad?" - Jorr asked.

"It's critical." - Axila replied in an accusatory tone. - "Finding you unconscious didn't help at all. We could neither determine the cause of your illness, nor find out who you were in contact with."

Jorr cursed under his breath. - "That's not my fault!"

"Calm down." - Luna asked. - "Let's first learn what had happened. Can you describe where you were before the disease developed?"

Jorr shortly described that he had spent most of the time in the asteroid belt, not interacting with anyone, until he was asked to return to their central logistics hub. There, he received a return pass to the capital city, and three days later, he lost consciousness in his home.

"This disease develops slowly." - Axila noticed. - "He had to catch it at the station."

"You can't contact it anymore, can you?" - Luna inquired.

"We actually can." - Axila said. - "Everyone there is alive and well."

"Hmm..." - Luna began to think. - "Maybe the disease doesn't spread during the initial stage of incubation and can infect only when the symptoms are fully visible."

"...but how was he infected? With the dust? By an anomaly?" - Axila asked.

"We will have to conduct a more thorough investigation." - Luna said. - "I would gladly help, but I don't think my crew should focus on assisting you."

"I understand." - Axila turned to Luna, her eyes determined. - "The technology you gave us is capable of working miracles, so help us once more. We can stop this pandemic."

"That's what I was suggesting already." - Luna uttered rather calmly. - "However, now you must wait."

Axila was lost.

"I can't diagnose it. Only she can" - Luna admitted, then pointed at Avi, who was in a deep sleep. - "I doubt she can diagnose the entire city, though, not to mention an entire planet."

"What are we supposed to do then?" - Axila uttered, concerned.

Luna sat in the nearby armchair and looked at the ceiling. - "I don't know. First, we need to wait until she wakes up, then eats breakfast. Otherwise, I doubt she will be able to assist us properly."

"...but..." - Axila quietly protested.

"Again, I warned you right before the surgery. You could choose what was your priority." - Luna stated without any hint of emotion.

Axila quickly understood she had nothing to say here. She crossed her legs, accepting the status quo, then fixed her glasses. Her calculating and serious expression was back. - "I will organize whatever is needed."

Charlotte and Nicolas were waiting in the VIP rooms, and were positively surprised when Avi finally joined them for breakfast. Axila arrived there a moment later, telling everyone that they would be transported to a new location, that is, a research station built next to the crystal in the center of the capital.

Once they were outside, four battle transporters waited for them, together with an armored limousine. During their flight, Axila silently checked the reports on her tablet. It didn't seem she was going to brief those present on the details.

Luna, however, came to the aid. - "I don't know if it'll work, but we plan to grant Eva and Avi access to a surveillance network via neural interface. I'll connect to it, too, to unburden her mind from the massive influx of information."

"Is it safe?" - Nicolas asked.

"As long as I'm with her, yes." - Luna stated confidently.

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Avi added with care in the world. - "Don't worry, it's not the first time. I'm not a stranger to danger."

"That's not a reason to take it lightly." - Nicolas warned.

Avi waved dismissively. - "Phi. I'll be alright."

Nicolas sighed, disappointed with her behavior. - "Luna. We're counting on you."

"I'll make sure she's safe." - Luna assured.

The limousine soon stopped, landing on a levitating, glass platform. In the middle of it, there was a sphere of intensely dark jade. The pavement made of black tiles led the crew along the line of inactive, half-meter-tall lamps to a round hatch closed with three triangular latches. When Axila scanned her eye,

they retracted in a spiral fashion, revealing a long and dark corridor that led directly to the sphere's center. Right there, a hibernation pod waited for Avi.

"Am I supposed to go inside?" - Avi asked.

Axila confirmed with a nod.

"Let me know when you're ready." - Luna requested. - "Axila and I will run system calibration, so we can start with simpler tasks first. If our initial tests don't succeed, we'll resign."

"Fine, fine. Makes sense." - Avi said as she entered the pod. - "Brr. It's cold in here."

"It's necessary." - Luna assured.

"Am I going to be surprised by anything else?" - Avi asked.

"An anesthetic-paralyzing substance will be injected, then the machine will connect directly to your nervous system." - Luna explained.

"Oh. Okay." - Avi muttered. - "Will it hurt?"

"It'll sting a little, then again after a minute." - Luna tried to calm Aviv down.

"Okay." - Avi took a deep breath. - "I'm ready."

"Administering anesthetic." - Axila informed, and Avi felt a needle pierce her neck for just a fraction of a second. Her body almost immediately went limp. - "Initiating neural link." - After Axila announced it, Avi's vision turned blurry, and she felt her psyche drift elsewhere...

"Hi, Avi." - Luna's voice echoed in the virtual room. - "It's nice to finally meet you, too, Eva."

"Ooo..." - Eva was impressed. She had her own body now. She was gazing at her hands, which were like a bunch of motes of green rectangular lights.

Avi stared at Eva, stupefied. - "Wait, so you can isolate her from me?"

"Yes, and no." - Luna replied. - "Your thought processes form two separate instances, so it's easy to differentiate between them when you're rooted in the interface that submerges your psyche in virtual space... but to sever your soul connection, and to transport Eva to a new body, is way harder."

Eva approached Avi from behind and touched her back, creating ripples. She then submerged her arm in Avi's avatar and began to move it around. Her innocent curiosity didn't bother Avi and Luna at all, though.

"...but if their civilization could develop this kind of technology, could we too?" - Avi asked.

"To fully submerge your brain in virtual space requires a powerful infrastructure. There is a reason we were taken to this station. Its computational network spreads across the entire planet's surface. Although I know this technology and I can hypothetically recreate it, and even miniaturize it, then at this moment, I would only be able to do it in my moon base." - Luna explained.

"Eva, did you hear?" - Avi replied.

Eva was still toying with her new body. She entered into Avi's outline, passing all the way through, then turned to face her. - "Uhm, no. Could you repeat what you've said?"

"Luna said that once we're back on Earth, she can create a place just like this one." - Avi explained.

"Ooo!!!" - Eva exclaimed with joy, but once she looked around, her excitement had died a bit. - "...but there's almost nothing interesting here."

"That's not a problem. Simulating artificial worlds is way easier." - Luna replied. - "Though, that's not what we're here for."

"Ah, yes." - Avi said. - "Saving the world."

Luna nodded. - "As I already mentioned, it's all one big experiment. I assume that your soul vision abilities are linked somehow, so you might need to cooperate. I can't really interpret the mechanism behind your communication, or read your precise thoughts and memories, but I assume that kind of link is intact here, too."

[Does she talk about this?] - Eva asked telepathically.

"O! I think so!" - Avi would clap her hands if they weren't passing through themselves.

"I assume you've already tested it." - Luna noticed. - "In that case, I would like to move on to the second part, that is soul vision."

"Ee... what precisely do you want us to do?" - Avi asked.

"The usual thing." - Luna requested.

"I can't close my eyes in this body." - Avi noticed.

"I can help!" - Eva said, then jumped into Avi's avatar and their bodies combined temporarily.

[I'm in!] - Eva exclaimed. - [Scanning!]

Avi's vision quickly adjusted to what Eva was seeing. There were a few souls nearby, that is, her own, Luna's, Axila's, souls of her parents, and of the guards.

Luna could see from Avi's expression that it was another successful test. - "What do you see?"

"The souls of everyone on this station." - Avi informed.

"Focus on my soul." - Luna requested, and when she noticed the changes in the readings of Avi's psyche, she added. - "Now, Axila's... your dad's, your mom's... hm... that's enough."

A few lights appeared in the virtual room.

"Is it... their souls?" - Avi asked. - "Can you see them, too!?"

"No." - Luna calmly replied. - "It's merely an interpretation of what you see." - She then continued, asking. - "Look at each one precisely, like you did during our diagnosis of patient zero."

Avi examined every soul for several minutes. - "No signs of disease."

"It took you quite a bit." - Luna noticed. - "Can you examine them all at the same time somehow?"

"Uhm... no, I don't think so..." - Avi said. - "...but Eva wants to try."

When Eva adjusted their vision, Avi couldn't observe all the souls simultaneously, but she felt their presence and could interpret who they had belonged to, and what their state was. Luna's virtual projections lit up, showing every diagnosed person at the same time.

"I think it worked?" - Avi uttered.

"Then, that's the easiest part." - Luna said. - "Now, we must figure out how to scan more of them, but leave that to me. Hmm." - Luna pondered for a long while, then summoned two screens and began to input commands so fast that her hands blurred into multiple afterimages.

When she was done, she turned to Avi and instructed. - "We have two options to diagnose the population. We can be precise, but it would require connecting every citizen to a neural network, or we can start with a superficial one, which will use the body scanners."

"Uhm, and I suppose to choose, or something?" - Avi asked.

"I would prefer the second option, but I don't know if your soul vision will allow it. The external interfaces aren't spiritually connected, so I'm worried the data we get won't be accurate." - Luna explained.

"So, what do we do?" - Avi replied.

"I adjusted their surveillance system to track the changes in the ordered structures. Still, given the information you've provided, it's heavily implied that those are closely related to the soul, and that's why I can't interpret the data like you do..." - Luna continued. - "...but that deeply-rooted structure still exists. All I need is a sufficiently large set of images, and then maybe... MAYBE... I can extrapolate a general diagnosis method."

"Can you put it simply?" - Avi asked.

"For now, we'll start with a preliminary analysis." - Luna informed. - "I'll ask Axila to bring some of the infected people here. You'll diagnose them, and I'll try to interpret your psyche signatures."

"Oh, okay." - Avi uttered.

"Bring in the first one." - Luna asked, and Avi began to work.