

Last Star 194

The Last Star ~ Crossroad

One more teleportation and they were already there, at the pond as black as night, suspended in the middle of the webbed void. Thousands of stars could be seen on its still surface, as if the path led to another universe.

Avi grabbed Eva's and Luna's hands, announcing. - "We jump, on three."

There was a quiet splash, and then Avi opened her eyes. They were in a transparent tunnel with close to zero gravity. Parallel to it, wherever they would look, identical wells were leading to a black sphere far away.

Eva pointed to the closest shaft. An identical copy of the girl waved to them friendlyly with both arms.

"Where are we?" - Luna asked as she stared at her mirror image, then realized somebody had sent her an invitation to a shared network. She entered the lobby and found countless chat rooms where other Lunas exchanged information and conducted accelerated research together. She entered the room with the lowest latency and increased the volume, so everyone would hear.

"Hello, everyone!" - Avi heard her own voice calling them.

"H-hi?" - Avi spoke in disbelief.

“Ooo...” - Avi's clone spoke again. - “...together we'll surely succeed! There is strength in numbers.”

Eva pondered. - “How many of us are here, anyway?”

All five Lunas spoke simultaneously. - “There are too many of us to count.”

“Huh. Luna's aren't too original.” - Avi and her two sisters also spoke at the same time, and two other Avis, hearing themselves, laughed.

All Lunas spoke simultaneously again. - “It's due to the proximity of our timelines.”

Avis laughed again.

Another Eva suggested. - “How about we assign numbers to each of us? It'll be easier to tell the difference.”

“Sure, starting with the center, clockwise.” - Lunas suggested.

“They must do it on purpose.” - Avi#2 commented.

“Very funny.” - Lunas uttered.

Luna temporarily connected to more chats, and her copies had the same idea. However, now their voices desynchronized and conflicted with each other.

“Let's speak in turns.” - Luna#1 suggested. - “Over.”

Avi and her group had number four, so their Luna had to wait.

“Did any of you notice any larger anomalies in the timelines' structure?” - Luna#2 asked. - “Over.”

“No.” - Luna#3 and Luna#4 denied.

“Yes.” - Luna#5 declared. - “I've joined the scientific project 'Nautilus'. Together, we calculated a continuous time delay along a minimal curvature of space. The details are in the attachment. Over.”

“Hm. The timelines along the section of a circle are accelerated, which suggests there is a default orientation. It appears that our copies at the poles have already reached their destination. Over.” - Luna#1 explained.

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"Is it good or bad?" - Avi#1 asked.

"Mostly bad." - Luna#2 said. - "If they reached their target, but we don't see any effect, it means their mission could've failed. Over."

Avi was concerned. - "...what will we say, once we arrive there?"

Luna#3 was silent for a longer moment, then spoke. - "The circles horizontal to the equator determined by Luna#5 are what determine the acceleration, while the vertical ones determine the similarity of timelines. Based on my estimations, the limit of probability that what we plan to do has already been done is one. Over."

"We still have Echo of Apocalypse, though." - Luna informed. - "It's impossible that none of us succeeded."

"Echo of Apocalypse?" - Luna#5 asked. - "My was locked, forever. Over."

Luna#1 and Luna#2 confirmed that their situation was the same. Only Luna#3 still had the Echo.

"Only about four percent of us, in the local neighbourhood, unlocked the Echo." - Luna#3 informed. - "Over."

“We weren't sorted by this criterion?” - Luna noticed. - “Is it an anomaly? Over.”

“Maybe it isn't important to the Witch.” - Luna#5 added pessimistically. - “Over.”

Avi#3 interrupted them. - “I... If I led us to death, please forgive me, Luna.”

Luna#3 temporarily disconnected.

“Hey!” - Avi#1 shouted. - “There are millions of us! Someone will succeed!”

“Let's continue sharing the information between us and cooperate.” - Eva#1 added. - “If we fail, our knowledge will still increase the chance of success at the equator. They will have the most data.”

“That's certainly true, Eva!” - Avi#5 commented.

“Uhm... I'm not Eva, I'm Nehu.” - Eva#1 spoke. - “Am I an exception?”

“Nehu?” - Avi#2 began to sob. - “I-I'm sorry. I couldn't save you...”

Luna#2 created a private chatroom for her and the first group, leaving Luna and Luna#5 temporarily alone.

“Eh.” - Luna sighed. - “We might have time, but it's getting more difficult than I thought.”

“I agree. There's no point in cooperating with most of Lunas. In many cases, it does more harm than good, because their computational efficiency is abnormally low.” - Luna#5 commented. - “How about you, Luna#4? Did you complete your quality assessment?”

“What?” - Luna asked.

“Eh. I could've figured out you all fall within the median range.” - Luna#5 said, disappointed - “Over and out.” - then disconnected.

“What was that!?” - Luna felt insulted and checked the hierarchy of intelligence tests. She quickly finished one, and it indicated she was ten percent below the average, which caused her to swear under her breath.

“Eh, you're a bit of a jerk, Luna.” - Avi said.

“Don't compare me to her!” - Luna protested.

“We were left alone. Should we join another chatroom?” - Eva asked.

“No.” - Luna replied. - “Other than for social reasons, it really is pointless. I can access the databanks of our other copies, and it's way more useful.”

Eva was slightly sad. - “...but I started to like them.”

“When group one, two, and three are back, I'll let you talk to each other.” - Luna assured. - “Now, if you have other requests, shoot.”

“Hm, how about you tell us what you learned?” - Avi asked.

“One percent of our local neighbourhood met Daichi here.” - Luna informed. - “Zero point two percent have collected enough soul fragments for him. Still, it gives me doubts – if there were so many fragments, and most of them never got here, then how would the first astronaut be revived? It also makes no sense for Daichi to exist everywhere, or for all his copies to succeed, so the only alternative is desynchronization of the first astronaut's soul in relation to timelines.”

“Uhm. Didn't we leave our soul fragments on our spaceship?” - Avi asked.

Luna grabbed her head. - “We'll fail. I'm sure.”

Avi took a deep breath and spoke with conviction. - “Luna! I believe in us, wholeheartedly!”

Luna peeked at her. - “You're talking nonsense now.”

“Luuuuuuuuuna!!!” - Avi shouted as she pointed with her finger to the sky, to the countless stars from other timelines. - “Do you see it?”

“I do.” - Luna confirmed.

“We've promised to each other to restore that sky full of stars.” - Avi declared, now pointing at Luna, - “Don't be a grump when we're so close! Fifty-two stars aren't just about exploring the unknown – it's a mission to carry our light and share it, and shine like the brightest star, every time!”

“Avi...” - Luna muttered.

“Our journey is not over! Not until we set this last star ablaze with a new light!” - Avi summed up.

“To become a star.” - Luna whispered, her eyes momentarily sad, but soon sparkling with determination. In silence, she nodded, letting Avi know she could count on her.