Last Star 195

The Last Star ~ Return of the King

The black sphere slowly approached, ready to engulf the Avi and her companions, who had already said goodbye to their new friends, wishing each other luck, and the chatrooms soon ceased to exist.

The trio of girls was pushed into a thick tar and barely squeezed out, then fell onto a steel floor.

"I was awaiting this moment." - A voice full of hatred spoke from above them.

Luna raised her eyes, recognizing that person. - "Ronra Na...?" - Before she could finish, a blade that could cut the space itself flashed, aiming at her neck. Luna wanted to teleport away, but her abilities, including even soul vision, were disabled by a black smoke that filled the entire room.

Eva, however, was fast enough and used her multitask cell to grab everyone and retreat to a wall in the back of the room.

"Tsk." - Clicking her tongue, Ronra adjusted her precognitive filter.

"How did you...?" - Avo coughed, but Ronra didn't let them ask any questions, or react. Her rebuilt body in upgraded Anaari armor blinked towards the enemy like a shadow. Eva pushed Luna and Avi aside and tried to block the attack, but it cut through the cell like butter.

Fortunately, Eva dodged at the last possible moment. Her practice with Luna paid off because she managed to jam all of Ronra's perception systems, burn her mobility modules, and block the ranged weapons.

It didn't give them enough advantage, though, because Ronra still had better training. Slash after slash, she was getting closer, seemingly predicting Eva's each dodge and quickly pushing her against the wall.

"Eva! Get rid of smoke!" - Luna shouted, revealing her position.

Eva immediately noticed that the dancing blades retreated and grew afraid. She pushed away some smoke, creating a bubble of clear air around her, which revealed spatial scars created with each of Ronra's cuts. Predicting Ronra's next move, she leaped to where Luna's voice was.

There, she found Ronra with her back turned to her. She was standing in front of a wall, staring at Avi's discarded wrist device. Realizing that Ronra has nowhere to escape, Eva decided to strike, but that's when Ronra stepped forward and disappeared into a portal.

It was too late for defense. Eva knew she had fallen into a trap. A loud crash could be heard above her, then she was hit by a shockwave and violently thrown to the side.

"It's not over!" - Eva could hear once again from Avi's glove. - "We have to weaken her armor!"

Eva, in pain, got up. - "Thanks..." - She grunted. - "It was close." - She focused, recalling every attack Ronra made before. She sent her multitask cell to the portals, trying to figure out how they were connected. She knew that Ronra was hiding somewhere near, but she couldn't cover the entire room with her cell-made spiderweb.

To her surprise, the smoke retreated, sucked in by the portals, revealing a corridor with wide windows beyond which there was only absolute darkness. The cold light of lamps illuminated a tall industrial container, where Ronra was standing without a helmet, gazing at the battlefield.

Luna was hiding near the middle of that bridge-tunnel, her weakened light still flickering irregularly. She was coughing the soot out and gradually restoring functionality of her body. Avi was right next to Luna, glued to the wall, her body frozen and her heart racing.

"Remember me." - Ronra uttered, then retreated into a portal.

"Are you okay!?" - Eva rushed to her friends, scanning them with her multitask cell and sending data to her spacesuit.

"Yes, but I've lost a lot of power." - Luna informed.

"What is she doing here!?" - Avi spoke as she composed herself. - "You neutralized her entire station at the Genesis Star!"

"I have no theories..." - Luna answered. - "...but her equipment is a hybrid technology. Somebody here learned Anaari's secrets and made many improvements. Luckily, it's an outdated model, developed before we visited the cube. Eva, grant me access to your scans. Next time, we'll surely be prepared."

A few windows flashed in Eva's helmet. - "Here."

Luna, in deep thoughts, turned herself off for a minute, then returned, instructing. - "Eva, I'll update your combat strategies. Give these new simulations a quick try." - Once Eva nodded, Luna continued. - "If Ronra isn't preparing any more surprises for us, it should be enough to counter her weapons. I'm only worried about one extra thing – Ronra uses a technology called 'precognitive filter' and I think it has something to do with the convergence of our behaviors in our timeline bundle."

"...but Anaari never mentioned gadgets like this." - Avi noticed.

"That's true. I assume it's the technology developed by Witch's scientists." - Luna guessed. - "Our survival must be a statistical anomaly."

"Are you saying that our twins..." - Avi uttered.

"I don't know, Avi." - Luna replied. - "I can't figure out why this anomaly happened, and what kind of anomaly it is. I assume the Witch created a sort of sieve that tries to reduce the amount of other-dimensional intruders until there's nobody left."

Avi clenched her fists. - "She's a monster."

"Maybe the early timelines were more successful, but I assume the witch doesn't want to listen to our repeated arguments now." - Luna added.

"Then we'll force her to listen." - Avi declared. - "After everything, she needs to answer for her actions."

Eva nodded. - "Let's stop this."

"Eh." - Luna sighed, her eyes glancing where Ronra once stood. - "We need to hurry, then. The more we wait, the bigger the chance Ronra collected more battle data from neighbouring timelines. We need to put pressure on her." - She flashed to the top of the container, asking. - "Follow me."

Eva grabbed Avi and transported them up via a cell-made platform, then, without any extra instructions, extended her hand and materialized a white blade, an exact copy of Ronra's weapons, and cut the space in front of them, creating a spatial scar leading to the new world.

The girl trio landed on the top of a steel train that was speeding through a sponge-like, porous interior of massive sandstone. Waterfalls of orange dust whipped against the surface of the cars, covering them in a rain of sparks. Ronra Naad waited on top of the locomotive, wearing an upgraded version of her battle suit.

Luna didn't wait and shot at Ronra with a ray of white energy, pushing the sand away and creating a cylindrical hole. Unfortunately, her attack was stopped by a light-absorbing, black, spherical shield, which showed only for a fraction of a second, concealing Ronra.

Without a word, Ronra began cutting the space with her twin blades, and the spatial scars, like two long ribbons, shot towards the back of the moving train. To avoid being sliced in half by the portals, Luna teleported herself and her friends without warning to an air pocket in the sandstone, letting the train and Ronra disappear in the tunnel.

It wasn't for long, because Luna's readings were going crazy. - "Eva! PORTAL, NOW!!"

"...where...?" - Eva wanted to ask.

"Anywhere!!" - Luna shouted as she summoned a shield before a supernova behind them engulfed the sandstone.

Avi was pushed into the portal first. She fell, rolling across a glitter-like dust, to a jagged edge of a rocky island high above the accretion disk of a black hole. She felt strong gravity pulling her into the void and quickly grabbed the asteroid, digging her fingers deep into the glistening, dark-rainbow sand. Her spacesuit adjusted its force field and temporarily locked her in a place until the hardened dust gave in, crumbling due to the forces that acted on it. When a fragment of the space island fell off, Avi closed her eyes. The asteroid piece flew away, but Luna was already holding Avi's hand and pulling her closer.

"Uff... thank you." - Avi uttered as she climbed higher with effort.

"That's a bad landing. Can you create another portal?!" - Luna called Eva.

"Where?" - Eva asked once more.

"Do you see this station? It looks like a good stop." - Luna pointed.

"Uff... too much is happening." - Avi commented after exiting the portal. They were in a place similar to the one where Ifea transported them. Beyond a wide window, another of millions of black giants devoured the glowing space dust.

Luna bit her lip and walked back and forth. - "She's stalling for time. I'm sure."

"We can't catch up to her anymore." - Eva informed.

"Yeah, I'm aware..." - Luna replied. - "...but I also know that I don't want to fight on her terms. It'll let her easily win."

Avi dusted off her spacesuit. - "She also got some new toys."

"She did." - Luna confirmed. - "She had to retreat to a region with a slower time dilation."

"What should we do?" - Avi asked.

"I don't know!" - Luna answered, frustrated. - "We might lose her if we make our choices more unpredictable... but we have to satisfy the initial requirements – I hope most of our choices aren't predetermined, and we will need a deeply chaos-infused random number generator."

"Eee... I don't want to leave you alone with that, but it sounds like it's not my area of expertise." - Avi uttered.

"Eva!" - Luna called. - "We'll experiment with the multitask cell a bit, but I warn you, it's rather dangerous!"

"I'll do my best." - Eva assured. - "What do you want me to do?"

"I've sent you the blueprints." - Luna said as she materialized a light-made machinery. - "Follow the instructions. I'll warn you if I notice any irregularities related to the extraction of refined chaos... and you, Avi."

"Yes?" - Avi asked.

"Move far, far away and be quiet. We need maximal focus." - Luna requested.

Avi sat next to the opposite window and observed the brown liquid that slowly oozed through light-made tubes, gathering in a spherical anti-gravity field, where it bubbled, randomly changing its color and structure, like a shapeshifting soup. Sharp spikes climbed towards the core of the device, at first slowly, then faster. However, before any could reach even one-tenth of the main tank, Luna pushed it back to the chaotic mass.

"Enough!" - Luna interrupted right after one of the spikes shot farther than three-quarters of the tank's radius. - "I've downloaded the random seed."

"Where should we head out now?" - Avi asked as she got up.

"Anywhere where the numbers point." - Luna informed as Eva was readying Ifea's staff.

There were not many new unlocked places, and this time, it was the Collar of Silence.