

## **Last Star 202**

The Last Star ~ Momentum ~ Part I

Avi rolled down steel panels, getting a few bruises. - “Ouch, ouch, ouch...” - When she tried to get up, her head hit against a hard object.

“OUCH!” - Two shouts could be heard simultaneously.

Both astronauts moved back, whining in pain. When their eyes met, they pointed at each other, exclaiming. - “Are you me!?”

“No, you are me!” - Avi protested.

The second Avi crossed her arms, averting her eyes with indignation. - “Not a chance. I'm the most original version of myself.”

“Hey!” - Avi protested again. - “I'm the only one of my kind, too!”

The second Avi opened one of her eyes, studying her copy. - “No wonder you're this clumsy.”

“You hit me first!” - Avi argued.

“...and unwilling to admit your faults.” - The second Avi added, lightly smiling as she stood up.

“Look who is talking!” - Avi said as she got up, too. - “It takes one to know one.”

They both felt like they understood each other without words. Together, they approached a balustrade in front of them, noticing they were on a mezzanine of a spherical room. Below them, there was a portal, and beyond the opposite window, there were swirling fragments of rainbow glass. Again, the inscription stated. - “New path opens only to those who paid with their own blood.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” - The second Avi asked.

“I don't know, you tell me.” - Avi replied.

“Do they want me to cut myself again?” - The second Avi hypothesised. - “Luna had bandaged me a few hours ago.”

“Same.” - Avi informed.

They looked at each other, realizing what they should do. - “Paper! Rock! Scissors!” - They shouted simultaneously.

Two rocks. Two papers. Two scissors.

“That was a stupid idea.” - The second Avi realized.

“Are you thinking what I'm thinking?” - Avi asked, and her twin nodded.

They both jumped down and pulled out a pocket knife. Two quick shallow pokes, and the blood dripped onto the portal.

“It's not working.” - Avi commented.

“That's not good.” - The second Avi added. - “We need to find Luna quickly.”

“I agree.” - Avi replied.

They looked around, noticing there were only two options – to head right or left.

“Where should we head first?” - The second Avi asked.

Avi, proud as a peacock, displayed Luna's app on her wrist device, which could make a randomized coin toss. - "Let fate choose!"

It was left.

"Okay, so we're going right." - The second Avi decided.

"Hey!" - Avi protested. - "And why is that!?"

"Because knowing your luck, you would get us in trouble." - The second Avi informed.

"OUR luck." - Avi corrected, but still headed right as her new friend suggested.

The second Avi caught up to her, and they continued in silence for a quarter of an hour, until she began thinking aloud. - "I'm wondering what this place is."

Avi looked beyond the window again. - "It's as if we were in the eye of the storm."

"It could be either the accretion disk or pocket dimension." - The second Avi guessed.

"I think it's the second... if the teleportation succeeded." - Avi said. - "Do you remember what happened when you tried to escape?"

"We were fighting Horegon's Skin Hunter, but we were losing, so we tried to run." - The second Avi informed. - "I just finished drawing the teleportation circle, but when I activated the spell, our enemy cut the seal and leaf under us in half. Luna was pulled into a different spatial rift, and we separated."

"A moment, please..." - Avi uttered. - "That's a lot to take! Too much!! I have questions!"

"Shoot." - The second Avi encouraged.

"What about Eva?" - Avi asked first.

"Who?" - The second Avi was caught off guard.

"Wait. Did you never meet her?" - Avi was shocked. - "She is the multitask cell itself."

"I'll tell you a secret – I can see souls. Nobody lives in this device." - The second Avi revealed. - "It's just a tool, nothing more."

"That only makes me have more questions." - Avi admitted.

"We have some time." - Her sister commented.

"I think I'll focus on the most important things. Other matters can wait." - Avi decided. - "Avi. I don't have multitask cell."

The second Avi stopped. - "W-what? How are you still alive!?"

"I had it temporarily, then uhm... Eva, my already mentioned friend, eee... how should I say this? She was living in my mind, and it almost killed me, then we gave her a replacement body, and I've lost all my powers." - Avi explained.

The second Avi scratched her helmet frantically. - "That complicates things!"

"Why?" - Avi asked.

"The Skin Hunter is targeting me. We tried to run away, but it always kept finding us, no matter where we would land! They could even enter pocket dimensions! It won't leave me until I become transformed into one of their kind." - The second Avi panicked.

"Hey! Calm down!" - Avi uttered. - "Uhm... our universes are combined here. I doubt it can jump between separate timelines."

"I hope you're right." - The second Avi said.

"If I'm not, then we'll kick their butt!" - Avi declared.

"We?" - The second Avi cackled. - "I bet I'll have to protect you all the time."

"Hey!" - Avi flexed her barely visible biceps. - "I can still pack a punch against bad guys."

The second Avi was suppressing a laugh, but soon couldn't help it and let it out. - "I don't doubt it! I know us too well!"

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Talking and joking around, both Avis reached a glass, spherical observatory. There, thick orange cables connected eight computers to the outer platforms, and also powered a large telescope, whose outer lens disappeared somewhere in the storm.

"I'll unlock access." - The second Avi suggested.

"Okay, and I'll look around." - Avi informed.

At first, she checked the computers, but they all required a password. She checked the telescope, but couldn't unlock the covers. Only once she began to rummage through the drawers, she had some success. She found a brochure, a company mug, and pen, a digital calendar, and a tablet with a fresh operating system.

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“Avi. I have something.” - Avi said. - “I know where we are.”

“Where?” - The second Avi asked, still connected to the mainframe with her multitask cell.

“It's a mining station.” - Avi informed. - “They're processing a disintegrating dust here.”

“That tells me almost nothing!” - The second Avi shouted.

“It's a fine ore that annihilates any matter it comes in contact with.” - Avi explained.

“Sounds dangerous.” - The second Avi commented before pulling her multitask cell back. - “It's ready! The machines should be working!”

Avi snapped her fingers. - “Let's have fun then! What are we starting with?”



"The telescope?" - The second Avi suggested as she jumped onto the chair in front of it.

"Hey!" - Avi protested. - "I want to look, too!"

"First come, first served." - The second Avi replied. - "Don't fuss and get it running! Chop-chop!"

"Hmpf." - Avi reluctantly pulled the lever to remove the covers. She also adjusted the filters so they would see past the fragments swirling outside.

The smile and enthusiasm of the second Avi disappeared faster than it previously appeared. She got up and grabbed Avi's wrist, pulling her. - "Horegon." - She spoke, paler than before. - "We need to run!"

"Wait!" - Avi asked as she pulled her hand free. - "Where do you supposedly plan to run?"

The second Avi scratched her head. - "I don't know! Wherever! I don't want to become one of those things!"

"Did you check the station's evacuation layout?" - Avi asked.

"Sure, sure, a moment, please!" - Avi's sister ran to the computer next to the mainframe. - "There's a train station at the lower levels, it leads to a space port!"

Avi nodded and jumped down the ladder to the bottom of the observatory, while the second Avi slid down, then forged the access card. Meanwhile, Avi still looked around. In the recess of a round table with scrap, there was a yellow exoskeleton with a replaceable drill and a heavy magnetic glove

"Do you think it'll be useful?" - Avi uttered.

"Do we have time for this!?" - The second Avi shouted as she hacked the door.

"I'll take a risk." - Avi informed, then equipped the mining suit.

The second Avi wasn't even listening to her. The hatch wouldn't open even when she tried to cut it apart with cell-made, scythe-like tentacles. - "Quick! Quick! Quick!" - She begged.

Avi approached. - "Let me try." - She put her exoskeleton's palm on the door, then activated the glove. A violent electromagnetic pulse launched the metal obstruction far into the corridor. - "Oops... too much power."

"It's fine, it's fine. We'll be fine." - The second Avi repeated, trying to regulate her breath. - "Lead. I'll watch our back."

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A heavy, industrial train sped along the evacuation tunnel with the maximum speed allowed by the gravitational-spatial distortion that pushed it. Although dozens of tornadoes were raging outside, sharp shards of ore were pushed away by the force field, beyond which it was possible to notice the shadow of the space port.

Soon, the train slowed down and stopped in a decontamination airlock. When the heavy bolts of the large gate retracted, the hangar appeared to be empty.

“What?” - The second Avi uttered, barely believing their bad luck.

“It seems we won't escape so easily...” - Avi noticed. - “...but there is a lot of room here. How about we prepare for a fight?”

“You don't get it!” - The second Avi exclaimed. - “You can't win against it!”

“Huh? Why?” - Avi asked. - “Every enemy must have a weak point.”

“It doesn't have one!” - The second Avi shouted. - “It's adapting like crazy! Once you wound it, or even kill it, it will heal or revive, immune to the weapon that damaged it.”

“...but we can still buy time, can't we?” - Avi asked.

The second Avi calmed down. - "We can."

"How about we use..." - Avi began.

"Disintegration dust?" - The second Avi completed her sentence. - "I thought about it, too, but I think we should save that option for a critical situation."

"Then how are we supposed to fight?" - Avi asked.

"It has a physical body. It can be slowed down a lot..." - The second Avi informed. - "...but not with multitask cell. It has already adapted to most of my techniques."

"Oh." - Avi said. - "I read they produce extremely durable alloys here. Will it suffice?"

"Hm. If we can lure it to the forge and drown it in liquified steel..." - The second Avi began walking back and forth, inputting commands into her wrist device. - "...but we would need a cooling catalyst for that."

"It sounds like you know your stuff." - Avi commented.

"The problem is, I don't!" - The second Avi complained, showing a computer on her wrist. - "Do you see it!? It's Luna's AI. It thinks for me, because I'm always useless!"

"Hey, Luna doesn't think so, so you shouldn't either." - Avi tried to cheer her twin up.

With slumped shoulders, the second Avi continued. - "I know... but you don't have one. Does your Luna trust you that much?"

"Eee..." - Avi involuntarily paused for a moment. - "...our timelines diverge too much to draw any hasty conclusions. Maybe my Luna didn't figure out she couldn't give me that kind of technology? Uh, and honestly, I think that your software is a sign that Luna cares about your safety, so don't overthink it. I think I'll ask for a similar device when I get a chance. I promise."

"Really?" - The second Avi raised her head to gaze into Avi's eyes. - "Won't it bother you?"

"Not at all." - Avi said. - "I might value my independence, but I still trust Luna. She often knows what she's doing."

The second Avi smiled, although with guilt. - "Now, I feel stupid... I complained about her gift for our entire journey. I despised how it told me how to live. It even regulated my diet and sleep hours."

"Eee... that does seem a bit invasive." - Avi commented, already regretting making her promise.

"...but it saved me, more than once." - The second Avi tenderly caressed the screen on her wrist, speaking with more confidence. - "Sometimes, I just... have to vent my frustration. Even if I know how much Luna does for me."

“Ehh.” - Avi smiled. - “Once you reunite with Luna, remember that it's your right to complain, and by that, I mean a looooooooooooooot.” - She suggested. - “In particular, about her. She may even call you a grouch, but don't give her peace. She needs to understand what it's like to have someone constantly interfering in everything you do.”

The second Avi smiled wickedly. - “...and who said that I'm not already doing that?”

Avi crossed her arms, puffing out her chest proudly - “Brave girl.” - and nodded with approval.

Sighing, the second Avi added. - “Well, I'm sure the first thing I do after coming back is giving her a piece of my mind for abandoning me... but it has to wait.”

“Right. We still need to prepare. We can celebrate later.” - Avi agreed, gazing at the four-lane tunnel leading deeper into the planet.

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The second Avi dematerialized the cell-made platform, which was used to transport them quickly, while the first Avi grabbed the bolt that was blocking the next gate and unlocked it. Both girls were hit by a heavy blast of hot air, then pushed back by a shockwave, which was followed by a loud clang. To avoid being hit again, both girls moved aside, behind the wall.

“Is it the Skin Hunter!?” - Avi shouted.

“No!” - The second Avi denied. - “It comes from the forge!”

Avi peeked inside between the shockwaves and noticed a heavy, automatic hammer that occupied one-fourth of the hall. Four massive gears on its sides were being turned by anti-gravitational magnets, and below them was a red-hot sheet of steel.

The hammer dropped again, forcing Avi to hide.

“It won't be easy to walk in there when it's working.” - Avi noticed.

“Right...” - The second Avi nodded, then pointed at four-meter tall crates. - “...but we can hide there after the next shockwave.”

“I don't think I can. My exoskeleton is too heavy and clumsy.” - Avi emphasized.

“Are you sure that you have discovered all it has to offer?” - The second Avi asked.

“Eee...” - Avi stammered. - “I don't think so?”

“The magnetic glove.” - The second Avi pointed out. - “Use it. Maybe with proper settings, you can pull yourself to the crates, or pull the crates to you.”

"Okay, I'll test the other buttons..." - Avi stated. - "...but move back. I don't want to hurt you by accident."

"Right, right... knowing our luck, it could turn out pretty badly." - The second Avi uttered, then moved as far away as she could.

"One, two, three!" - Avi counted. The magnetic glove rotated and clicked, shooting with a gravity pulse. It hit the crate, but it didn't move an inch. - "Nothing." - Avi said, trying to withdraw her hand. She quickly realized that she couldn't. - "Uhm, is it stuck?"

"Try to..." - Before the second Avi could finish, Avi pulled a lever and was launched towards the crate. There was a bang so loud that the second Avi thought her friend might turn into a bloody pancake. - "Avi!"

"I'm fine!" - Avi shouted back.

The second Avi exhaled in relief. - "Let's not test it too much!"

"Eee... Avi, I think we will need to. There's not a lot of space to move around." - Avi informed.

"A moment." - The second Avi quickly maneuvered between crates, stopping and patiently waiting after each shockwave. She carefully read her AI's instructions, optimizing her path. - "It's a bit complicated, but I think we can solve it using your glove and my mobility. Do you see the crate to your left?" - The



second Avi began explaining to the first Avi the safest route, while she snuck to the control panel protected by industrial glass. - "Now, hold tight and don't let go! I'll transport you to the other side!" - She requested.

Avi did exactly that and locked her magnetic arm on the crate, which soon launched upwards, to the transport rail under the ceiling, then slowly moved above the vats with melted ore.

"I trust you know what you're doing!" - Avi shouted and closed her eyes.

"Be patient!" - The second Avi called. - "I'll tell you when to drop!"

"What!?" - Avi protested. - "Can't you just put me down gently!!!"

"No! Drop now!!" - The second Avi instructed.

Avi knew she would regret this. The exoskeleton landed on a conveyor belt with a heavy thud and was hit by the shockwave right away. It launched Avi towards the back of the room, making her hit and dent another crate. A magnet crane activated above her, pulling her body up, then another magnet threw her to the left, then forward, then down, then backward again. There, she was hit in the head by an arm of another crane, making her fall onto her belly.

"Sorry!" - The second Avi shouted, moving the same crane to grab Avi by her leg. She set the rotation speed to maximum, then released when it was about to make three full rotations. Avi flew all the way to the control panels placed opposite the second Avi, crashing into the smaller containers placed under the industrial glass. - "Are you alright!?"

Avi scrambled out of the crushed crates. - "No... I'm all dizzy." - A sound of vomiting could be heard through the comms.

"Uhm..." - The second Avi gave her sister a moment. - "...Does your suit have an auto-cleaning function?"

"It does..." - Avi uttered. - "...but it doesn't help with migraine. Eh, what's next?"

"Levers." - The second Avi pointed. - "We have to pull them at the same time. It's an emergency lock." - Soon, the hammering stopped, and both astronauts could look around.