

## Last Star 207

The Last Star ~ Faster Than Light

Luna was surrounded by the vastness of space, her body drifting through darkness as she gazed at the last of the stars. Their dim light barely let Luna turn into her human form again, and the Farthest Point reflected in her eyes.

"I'll come back." - Luna uttered. - "I promise."

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Avi crossed her arms and stared at the Witch, who was still frozen, touching her lips.

"You didn't forget." - Avi said, still angry.

The Witch lowered her arm and turned to Avi. She wanted to listen to her one last time, once again hear that there is hope. However...

"...that's one more reason why I can't fail today." - The Witch spoke with conviction. Her arm reached towards a scepter resting against a nearby wall, then telekinetically pulled it, ready to defend what she believed in. - "Let's repeat this dance once last time."

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Luna, in a captain's outfit, was standing at the bridge of her flagship called 'Hope'. She was surrounded by her friends and war comrades, who joined her over the cycles of her preparation.

Luna's arm pointed ahead at their target – the farthest, last star.

“Pierce through the hell itself and laugh in the face of death!” - Luna yelled. - “Reach where no one reached before, to claw our lives out of destiny's grasp.”

Her officers cheered with her, then tossed their berets in the air to celebrate.

“Start the long-jump engines!” - Luna ordered, and once they were ready, added. - “Together! Towards the new dawn!”

Millions of lights flashed, cutting across the void, while Luna continued to instruct her crew. Her plan wasn't to destroy the enemy fleet, but just to create a breach that would allow them to get through.

There was only one chance, and she knew that the Witch had repeated fights like this countless times. She had to somehow force her to scatter her ships, but that's what Astronauts and Anaari, her elite units, were for.

“Desynchronize, now!” - Luna shouted when her upgraded chaos-fueled device picked the right moment. The fleet created numerous copies of itself, forming a half-sphere of mirror images so large that predicting Luna's true position was statistically impossible.

The space ahead of them glowed in countless violet dots, indicating her plan had worked.

“Activate Chadack's shields!” - Luna ordered.

The laser rays struck Luna's fleet, scattering like a rainbow against the distorted space. That's when the alarm started blaring.

“Report, fast!” - Luna demanded.

“It's the Golden Needle!” - One of the officers shouted back. - “They've betrayed us and are sending our security codes to the enemy!”

“Neutralize them.” - Luna coldly ordered.

“I'm worried I can't allow that.” - Another, science officer spoke, dropping the camouflage field. Time slowed down, causing everything around them to stop, and although Luna sped up her thought processes, her body could barely move.

“Skorov.” - Luna hissed in slow motion.

“Ah, so it's true that Anaari's daughters don't forget.” - Skorov said as he put a cybernetic cube onto the floor. - “Allow me to take command.”

The cube glew and its walls spread out to the sides, freeing an imprisoned Seraphin of Delusions.

“Checkmate.” - Skorov spoke calmly, with a confident smile.

Luna closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her speech was back to normal. - “I'm immune to your curses.”

“You might be, but your crew isn't.” - Skorov replied, creating two extra temporal bubbles around him and the Seraphin, then another around Luna. From Skorov's point of view, the time outside was back to normal, and for Luna, it accelerated, giving her only a fraction of a second to react before her brainwashed crew sabotages their mission.

Arcs of light passed Skorov and pierced the spacesuits of other officers. When they fell dead, an anti-intruder protocol activated and soulless Anaari entered inside, disintegrating the Seraphin and capturing Skorov before he could escape.

“Mission status.” - Luna asked after she was freed from the bubble.

“Our private keys are in the enemy's hands. The operation is compromised.” - Anaari informed. - “Orders?”

"Destroy the Golden Needle's fleet." - Luna said as she stepped towards Skorov.

"The order had been relayed." - Anaari confirmed. - "What about the prisoner?"

"I'll execute them personally." - Luna coldly stated and lifted her finger to the forehead of the enemy spy. Before Skorov could open his mouth to negotiate, a ray of light pierced his skull, slamming it against the steel floor with a loud thud. - "Send replacement officers in. We're continuing our assault."

When Anaari left the bridge, Luna reached for cigarettes in her pocket. She lit one, inhaled the smoke, then snorted in resignation. - "Hope."

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"We have lost over eighty percent of the main fleet." - The replacement officer called. - "I predict we will reach only twenty-five percent of the target depth at our current speed."

Luna tapped against her armrest, thinking about changing her strategy. - "Forgive me, Aurora." - She whispered as her other hand changed the communication channel.

The Astronauts' commander answered. - "Everything is ready. Awaiting orders."

"Do it." - Luna replied, then watched a squadron of fighters and light frigates leave the battle formation, making way for the flagship of God's Sickle.

It was a seemingly simple and primitive rocket with a rectangular solar sail, which soon detached its rear module. It stopped, then reshaped itself into a ring. Next, the middle module also detached, blooming like a steel flower. The final, leftover frontal module opened, revealing a single biological eye glowing in red.

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“Clear the left flank.” - Luna ordered, and the eyes were mechanically forced to turn. The Witch's fleet in the cone of Aurora's vision turned on itself, temporarily creating a gap in the defenses. - “Full speed ahead!” - After these words, the Astronaut's fleet exploded, neutralized by the concentrated enemy fire, leaving nothing but scrap. - “Send the golem-ships to reinforce Epsilon-V's fleet. I don't want to see any gaps in our outer shell.”

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“Prepare a summary report.” - Luna asked the replacement officer.

“We can no longer replace our losses.” - The woman replied quietly, giving Luna the tablet with data. - “Our spearhead is growing smaller. I estimate the operation to fail before we reach seventy-five percent of the target depth.”

Luna sighed. - “Yeah, that's bad news.”

“Will you intervene?” - The officer asked.

“As a last resort...” - Luna informed - “...but then, I won't be able to turn back the clock of the Echo of Apocalypse.”

“...but without Astroanut's weapon, we will all die...” - The officer began speaking, but Luna raised her hand to interrupt her.

“We wait.” - Luna ordered. - “Provide continuous reports.”

After three hours, the officer informed that forty percent of Spearhead's mass was lost. After two more, it was another fifty percent.

Luna stood up, sighing. - “I still remember your promise.” - She flashed beyond the window and appeared on the outer, frontal section of the bridge, then began reinforcing the shields of leftover spaceships with her light.

When the last ships outside were destroyed, the Witch's fleet concentrated its fire on just a single point. Luna's shield continued to glow with extreme heat and was about to be shattered when a massive shadow obscured the sky, blocking enough of the enemy's projectiles to allow Luna to reactivate her force field.

“It's Goliath!” - Cheers of joy could be heard in Luna's comms.

Goliath, scarred and with its inner hull exposed, rammed through the Witch's fleet.

"It's good to see you again, Caleb." - Luna sent through a direct channel.

"You've lost sight of light, but we're here to guide you back." - Caleb declared. - "It's the Goliath's will."

A powerful beam of light shot from Goliath's bright core, reducing all the Witch's ships in its path to ashes. Even once the supermassive black hole was hit, large ripples of its surface formed.

"Retreat and hide in Goliath's armor!" - Luna ordered. - "They'll escort us!" - She flashed back to the bridge, to join her celebrating crew.

The enemy drones that tried to block the Goliath's path were crushed like flies, forming a thick layer of steel scrap in the front. The Farthest point was almost visible beyond the black curtain and seemed like it was within arm's reach.

"We can do it!" - The replacement officer called as she analyzed the reports.

"Stay alert." - Luna requested. - "Do our scans pick up any anomalies?"

"None." - The new research officer said.



“...then what is this fragrance...” - Luna whispered. - “...of wilted roses?” - She messaged everyone to confirm they were sensing it too, then immediately shouted. - “Evacuate right now!”

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Like a white ribbon, Luna's light fighter manoeuvred between the gaps in Goliath's armor, passing the approaching drones and shooting down enemy hornets. Luna's crew carved a path through the survivors of Witch's fleet and entered the supervoid behind enemy lines.

“It's coming! Fly up! UP!” - Luna warned her companions.

A ray of black liquid pierced the space, crushing a large part of Luna's squadron and cutting deep into Goliath's hull. A scar along the entire ship's length appeared, and the tar-like substance began corroding the armor, its corrupted roots reaching deep into the core.

Goliath's light faded, and with it, the last chance to pierce through.

“Hahahahahahaha!!!” - An overjoyed, mad laugh could be heard in every pilot's cockpit.

Opposite Luna, another wall of enemy ships appeared, and with it, a small child in a witch's hat. It was clear from her expression that she was the one laughing.

Luna called the closest corvette, a replacement flagship of the Möbius syndicate. - "Destroyer, is it her?"

"It's a spiritual homunculus..." - Destroyer informed. - "...by wounding it, we can wound her, too."

"We'll clear a path for you. Can you handle her?" - Luna asked.

"I was hoping you would join." - Destroyer replied.

"I have other priorities." - Luna said.

Destroyer laughed. - "Hoho, are you asking your main benefactor to participate in a suicide mission? Brave, but not very clever."

"I'm not asking. It's an order." - Luna stated firmly.

"What if I refuse?" - Destroyed asked.

"You'll end up just like the Golden Needle." - Luna replied.

"I was the one who was supposed to pierce her heart with that dagger." - Destroyer protested. - "You promised me!"

"If you can't earn this chance, you don't deserve it." - Luna spoke coldly. - "It's one of the lessons you taught me."

"...so that's how you're paying me back?" - Destroyer uttered.

"Don't be surprised. You were never interested in saving the universe or atoning for your sins." - Luna added. - "Someone who is here solely for revenge is not cut out for this."

Destroyer's breaking laugh filled Luna's cockpit. The man was furious. - "I'm putting your name on the second spot of my list. You already know, it can't be erased."

"You can put it even on the first spot, as long as you cooperate for a moment." - Luna replied with confidence. - "Over and out."

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The last few of the lightest ships fired at the enemy fleet. The fighter squadrons flashed forward with immense speed, dodging the wreckage like curving threads of light. Leading them was 'Angel Wing' with Luna inside, and it continued to cut the enemy's drones and hornets with thousands of white lances. Still, the enemy fire was too heavy for Luna's shields to effectively protect her companions, and their names disappeared from the screens in her cockpit one by one.

Luna waited to see if Destroyer would fail. There was a blinding flash of light, and a laser ray cut through the void, heading at the witch. It seemed it would be a lethal hit, but the Witch waved her hand, turning the plasma into a cloud of purple butterflies that covered the entire sky.

“Hahahahahahaha!!!” - The same laugh echoed inside the helmets of surviving pilots.

One after another, their bodies just exploded, coloring the cockpits' windows red. Only Luna, immune to magic, could pass.

“Fly, fly, little cuckoo. I'll pluck your feathers out.” - The witch hummed, forming a funnel with her butterflies and sending it towards the 'Angel Wing'. It crashed violently into the fighter, causing Luna to lose all vision and causing all her scans to go crazy. She was pushing through blindly, searching for any familiar signal to teleport to and escape.

For a moment, a small white dot appeared on her radar.

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Luna fell, crashing into the gaming console and the cabinets with vinyls, which dropped onto her head.

'Where am I?' - Luna whispered as she scanned the room. Her mouth opened in disbelief. She never thought she would be saved by that. Once she approached the small altar, she lifted the photo, and a tear welled up in her eye. - “Avi...” - She recalled her radiant smile, which she hadn't seen for so long.

Involuntarily, Luna reached for the pendant that she carried on her neck and played the melody that she used to play every night. A wave of nostalgia hit her heart, bringing back every buried memory, their every argument, their every moment of joy, and every star they had visited.

"I'm almost back..." - Luna whispered.