

## Last Star 35

Star XVI ~ Dream Set Sail ~ Part I

When the girls arrived at the next star system, their spaceship stopped without any extra inputs from Avi. An intense light of blue hyper-giant made its way in through the ship's tinted windows, illuminating the dim rooms in a faint afterglow.

Luna was watering the flowers in the botanical section of the ship when Avi climbed down the ladder to her. - "Reporting! I've found two planets and one artificial space object!"

"... Okay, what can you tell me about the planet's atmospheric conditions?" - Luna asked, without interrupting her work.

"Uhm... the first one is barren, and the second one is in the habitable zone, but entirely covered in ice." - Avi explained.

"...and what about the signatures of intelligence?" - Luna added, gently smiling.

"...uhm... the ship doesn't show that data." - Avi informed.

"I kind of expected that. You have to connect with it deeper, manual controls aren't enough." - Luna said.

"I don't know if I want to. I'm doing fine... without 'diving'. Can't you detect the signatures somehow?"

“Without the ship? Not really, it amplified my abilities. I'll know once we land... but I have a limited detection radius.” - Luna replied. - “So, where do you want to land first?”

“I thought about checking the space station out first, it was mentioned on the terminal on the soap planet, after all.”

“Sounds like a good idea, then. Please set a course, I'll join you when I'm finished here.”

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Luna's spaceship jumped, and a small, blue space station could be seen beyond its windows. It was shaped like a sphere and surrounded by a slowly rotating ring of sapphire panels. The dock entrance was glowing with a soft teal light, and above it was a sign, “Welcome to 'Rebirth'.”

Avi crossed the station's forcefield, then carefully entered the tunnel inside and stopped her ship on one of six landing spots, which were illuminated by a floor lamp in an annular shape slightly bigger than the girls' saucer. On their left and right side, close to the walls, there were stairs leading to two other platforms. The left side was reserved for trading terminals, the right was a large waiting area with tables and chairs.

“Where are we heading?” - Avi asked after jumping out of the ship.

Luna scanned the place. - “Trade terminals are still working.”

“...so left, it is.” - Avi uttered and climbed the stairs. In four cavities, hanging from a bundle of cables, were steel spheres with a single cybernetic eye. Next to them, on narrow and flat screens, there were pictures of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, spaceship modules, tools, and various supplies, such as seeds or ores.

Avi approached one of the terminals and the eye glowed for a moment, then turned off. There was a note on the screen – no currency detected.

“Luna... I think we need you.” - Avi called.

“I noticed.” - Luna said, and scrolled through the offer.

“Is there anything interesting there?”

“They have nothing we might need, but this station's security is tight.” - Luna answered. - “We'll need paid daily passes to allow us to access their services. I'll register us as the guests with the highest possible permissions... and done.”

After this, Luna and Avi traveled to the second platform, where behind a waiting area, there was a cloakroom and a check-in desk. Both were serviced by robots. The first one looked like an upside-down pyramid with a triangular head and similar, winged arms. The second was made from a glass-like material with smooth, sinusoidal shapes and had a glowing inner component.

The door to the next area was closed, so Avi approached the second robot, asking what they were supposed to do to be granted entry. She was pointed to the cloakroom and asked to leave all of weapons there, including multitask cell, then to return to the check-in desk.

Avi followed their wishes, and once she was back, the robot scanned her from head to toes, then replied with melodious - "Entry granted."

Luna was next, but when she was scanned, the robot instantly lit up red. - "An energy-shifting entity detected. Unidentified Anaari technology. Aspectual distortion blocker required. Please, retrieve the device from the cloakroom."

"Eh." - Luna sighed. - "I don't like it."

"Oh, Luna. Please follow the rules, we're guests after all."

"Nobody lives here anymore. If this place didn't have emergency cut-off systems, I would force my way in." - Luna replied, but still allowed the first of the robots to place their blocking bracelet on her wrist.

"...and, how does it feel?" - Avi asked.

"It stops me from shifting shapes and light." - Luna said. - "We're very vulnerable here."

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“...but you said there is nobody here, so we don't have to be afraid.” - Avi replied.

“I hope you're correct.” - Luna replied sceptically.

Both girls waited in front of the gate, waiting until another scanner was done. When a blue lamp above them turned on, they were finally permitted to enter.

Avi gazed at a vast, crescent hall with a long counter above which screens with various menu options were suspended. On their right, under the station's glass wall, there was a dinette decorated with exotic pot plants, possibly from different parts of the galaxy. Some of the tables, for guests' privacy, were hidden behind folding screens, but Avi preferred a spot with a star's view.

“Should we order something?” - Avi asked, observing how one-eyed drone-like waiters are hovering in the air idly.

“I won't refuse.” - Luna replied.

When Avi and Luna sat down, a holographic touch menu was summoned in front of them.

“There's a lot to choose from here...” - Avi uttered.

"A synthetic meat..." - Luna started listing. - "...that is fish ...poultry ...insects."

"Bleh! How can anyone eat something that resembles living beings!?" - Avi commented.

"It's synthetic, so no creature was hurt, and it's more nutritious than plant-based meals." - Luna replied.  
- "The food of your ancestors. Maaaaaybe I'll give it a try!"

Avi's face contorted.

"I'm kidding." - Luna added. - "I won't even put that in my mouth... ooo... a bun with grilled vegetable patty, cooled soda drink based on sugar and caffeine, cut potatoes fried in deep oil... Avi, do you recognize it?"

"How... is it here?" - Avi asked in disbelief. - "It was in our historic documentaries." - Avi raised her hand, shouting. - "Waiter, please!"

The robot arrived in absolute silence.

"Can you tell us where this dish is from?" - Avi asked.

"A courtesy from one of our guests. He entered the dish, along with many others, into our systems." - The waiter informed.

"Do you know where he was from and where he went, or anything about who he was?" - Avi bombarded the robot with questions.

"We're sorry, but we do not disclose confidential information about our guests." - The waiter replied.

Avi sighed. - "Ehh... why is it always like this?"

"...maybe we'll have more luck elsewhere." - Luna added from behind her menu.

"No. We have to find every possible clue here!" - Avi responded.

"...okay, okay, calm down a little. You don't plan to go hungry?" - Luna said.

"No, of course not. I think I'll take this dish from Earth." - Avi decided.

"...and I would like..." - Luna's finger slowly moved down the menu. - "Nutritient Jellies!" - She pointed at cubes in all colors of the rainbow. - "...and this drink!" - It was a hot liquid, parallel to cacao, topped with whipped cream and sugar sprinkles.

The waiter noted everything, then returned with meals after a moment. Luna tasted her first jelly, and she was so delighted that she danced in her chair.

Avi bit into her burger, then sipped a bit of cola, and her eyes opened wide. - "This soda... You can get addicted to it." - She said. - "Did my ancestors... really live like this? And there is still more of that?"

"We can always return here." - Luna said, impaling another cube on her chopstick. - "Mmm... so sour and juicy."

When they finished their meals in peace and got up, Avi started looking around the station, checking the signs. She wasn't sure where to go first. - "Maybe... maybe this way?" - She pointed to 'Chamber of Memories'. It was just past the pink corridor illuminated by lights of the same color, filled with fog and perfume scent.

"Welcome." - A voice spoke from behind the fumes, which soon cleared, revealing a creature with a long, serpentine neck and a head like a flat disc.

"Good morning." - Avi uttered timidly. - "Can you tell us who you are and where we are?"

"Me? I am merely a humble guide, and this place is a safe haven from those who want to escape reality." - The creature spoke.

"That... doesn't tell us a lot." - Avi said.



The creature's neck extended forward, encircling Avi. - "I sell dreams... or even, an eternal blissful sleep, for those who decide to make this place their new home."

"We don't play to stay... surely, not forever." - Avi replied, taking a step back, but the neck blocked her way.

The disc moved closer to Avi's face. - "...then, is there anything you look for?"

"Was anyone here looking like me?" - Avi asked.

"Mmm... I think there was." - The creature said with a hint of curiosity.

"You have to tell us everything you know about him!" - Avi requested.

"I can't reveal... anything that dreams won't." - The creature said mysteriously.

Luna interrupted. - "Then, reveal those dreams to us."

"Ohh... I never thought I'd meet a lightbearer here..." - Their guide spoke. - "...without shackles on her neck."

Luna furrowed her brows. - "Enough with the politeness and beating around the bush. We want to see what this place has to offer."

"Why the hurry?" - The head moved away, freeing Avi. - "...I'll prepare the pods ...but are you prepared to pay?"

"Don't be worried about the credits, we have a lot of them." - Luna replied.

"You don't pay with credits here." - Their guide said while pulling levers with its tentacles. The mist gradually disappeared, revealing cylinders made of pink glass. - "Please... come inside."

"...and what are we supposed to pay with?" - Avi mentioned anxiously.

"Memories." - The creature replied.

Avi stopped, almost paralyzed. - "I will not give my memories! Luna, we should leave."

"Oh, oh... what a misunderstanding." - The creature moved her tentacles over the counter. - "The first trial... is almost free. I only need a tiny copy... of something special. I'll choose myself."

"Only a copy?" - Avi asked, still unsure.

"Yes, it shouldn't hurt, I promise. The entire extraction process will take place during your visit..." - Their guide pointed with one of her limbs. - "...there. Although a small warning, this promotion... hihi... You only get to use it once."

"Luna... do you think we should trust her?" - Avi asked.

"If it tries anything funny, I'll blow this entire station to dust." - Luna warned.

"Oh... oh... she can show her fangs! How... cute." - The guide commented.

Luna's light became angrily bright, to show that she's not joking around. - "Even with this stupid bracelet, I'm still dangerous."

"My, my... please, calm down!" - The creature spoke. - "Two pods, two wishes. Who do you want to see?"

"Maybe I'll look for our Earth traveler, and you will try to learn more about the creators?" - Avi suggested.

"Sounds fine, I'll wait here until you're done, just in case. Then, I'll decide if it's worth the effort." - Luna replied.

Avi nodded and approached the chamber. When she entered, its glass door slowly closed, and the pod started filling with pink smoke. The scents mixed, creating images in Avi's mind, images of places that she had never seen or known. She collapsed to the floor, unconscious, and she wandered down the paths of the past.