

## Last Star 36

Star XVI ~ Dream Set Sail ~ Part II

Avi felt the lash of a whip across her back and turned around, her eyes filled with tears and hatred.

“Move, meat. Move.” - She heard.

Her oppressor was a crab-creature on a mechanical chassis, the folds of its fat skin draped down, concealing the metal that creaked under their weight. Under their two fat and short antennae, one could also notice a flat nose and saliva-smeared lips with a cigar.

The creature raised one of its four arms once again, and the fetid stench from underneath its armpit reached Avi's nostrils. The whip cracked against the back of the red-skinned girl in front of Avi. She fell to the ground, barely breathing, and the crab-creature nodded to a tattooed android, who was walking next to slaves.

“This one is too weak.” - The creature said. - “Move her over to the cart, she goes to the butchery.”

As the android approached the girl lying on the ground, Avi lunged at its leg and began to bite it. She felt the lash of a whip again, but she wouldn't let go.

The fat creature stopped the caravan, then pulled the boy away from the android with such force that a fragment of its synthetic skin came off along with him. It lifted the child to its face, exhaling a cloud of smoke in his face. - “Do you want to go to the butchery too, my boy?” - It asked.

Avi just spat the android's skin out at the monster's face.

It smiled like a bandit, then added. - "A feisty one, take him to the iron maw. I'm eager to see how long it takes to break him."

Avi squirmed and struggled, trying to break free from the grip, but with her hands shackled behind her back, it was impossible. She felt an electric impulse on her nape, then lost her consciousness.

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When Avi woke up, she was locked in a dungeon with a very low ceiling that forced her to crawl. In front of her, there were rows of grates, beyond which was a muddy corridor, and another row of grated prisons with children of her age. They crouched, dirty and scared.

"Hey!" - Avi called a feathered boy with bird wings, who wouldn't stop crying. - "Hey, you!"

The boy turned to her, his sobbing partially stopped.

"We'll get out and the fatso gonna pay!" - Avi said.

"You're lying!" - The boy yelled and continued to wail.

Avi turned her head. Some kids were looking at her with pity, others were defeated and indifferent.

“We can do it, together.” - Avi called everyone as she grabbed the metal rods.

“Stop!” - A girl called from behind the opposite grating. She had crystalline skin and long, golden hair. -  
“Your shouting won't change anything. You're only causing them more pain.”

Avi looked at the expressions of everyone around, they changed, some were hateful, others full of disapproval.

When she understood what it meant, tears welled up in her eyes, but she bit her lip and hissed. - “No.” -  
Then repeated louder. - “NO!”

“Shut up!” - Another boy, with black skin and white tattoos, threw mud in Avi's face.

“I'll get us out, you will see.” - Avi said through clenched teeth, only to get hit again.

It was interrupted by the loud creaking of a heavy door and the clang of something striking steel. Feet, like those of an elephant, walked down the corridor, and the children were handed out bowls with brown slush.

When they were close to Avi, she started screaming. - "Let us out, you dumb scoundrel!"

The feet silently passed her cage and soon were gone. Avi was the only protesting kid, and she was the only one who didn't get any food.

"Phi." - The black-skinned boy commented, then began to shove the slurry into his mouth.

Avi was starving, but all she could do was watch as everyone but her was filling their bellies. Everyone, except one other person.

"Here, take it." - It was the crystal girl.

"No, thank you. It's yours, you eat." - Avi responded.

"My kind doesn't need to eat." - The girl said. - "Take it and eat."

Hearing this, Avi accepted, still unsure what to say in response. - "Thank you." - She finally uttered.

"Just promise me that you'll be quiet now." - The girl added.

Avi wouldn't answer, instead, she packed the slush into her mouth. It had a bland taste, like wet and rotten cardboard.

"What's your name?" - The girl asked.

"Daichi." - Avi answered. - "You?"

"Quia." - The crystalline being said, then smiled.

"Quia." - Avi finished the rest of her meal in one gulp. - "I'm not kidding, I'll get us out even at the cost of my own life."

"You don't know what you are talking about." - Quia replied. - "Do you even know where we are?"

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

"No." - Avi responded.

"It's a spaceship of Flesh Brokers." - Quia continued. - "The only way to survive it is to become one of them."

"How do you know this?" - Avi asked.

Quia's face became sad. - "From... from my parents."

"You'll return to them." - Avi replied. - "I promise."

Quia clenched her teeth. - "That's what I'm talking about, you pay zero attention to your words. My own parents, they sold me."

"I... I'm sorry." - Avi uttered quietly.

"Next time, think twice before you say anything." - Quia added. - "Enough about me, were you sold too?"

"No." - Avi said. - "I was kidnapped."

"Then, someone will be looking for you." - Quia tried to comfort Daichi.

"No, nobody will." - Avi wrapped arms around her knees, depressed.

"How so?" - Quia asked.

"I don't have any family. I lived in an orphanage, but nobody cared about us there." - Avi answered.

Quia averted her eyes. - "I understand."

The gate creaked again, and the two closest cells were opened. The children inside them were led outside, to the light and the end of the corridor.

When the door closed, Avi asked. - "Where do they take them?"

"I don't know." - Quia replied.

"To butchery." - The black-skinned boy said.

"Don't scare them!" - Quia warned, seeing that some of the children were retreating deep inside their cells, and others were crying uncontrollably.

"I'm telling the truth." - The boy continued. - "They'll remove our organs and turn everything else into mincemeat. I saw it with my own eyes." - He tried to appear brave, but his hands were shaking.

Avi was terrified herself. When the door opened and the black-skinned boy was taken, together with another prisoner, he looked completely pale.

"I'll kill them." - Avi gritted her teeth as she spoke. Right now, she looked almost like a monster. - "I'll kill everyone."

"Daichi..." - Quia whispered.

After five more minutes, the door opened again. A three-armed robot flew inside and opened Quia's and Daichi's cells.

"You pile of junk!" - Daichi said, throwing mud at the robot's lens. - "RUN!" - He grabbed Quia's hand, then pulled her to the light.

Once they were outside, he stopped abruptly. Before him, on a sandy arena, there was the black-skinned kid, covered in blood and squeezing a dagger with a fierce grip. In front of him, another three-armed robot dragged the dead body of the other prisoner.

"I... had to." - The black-skinned kid muttered.

Avi was too stunned to react. She was surrounded by bleachers filled with robots, androids, and other alien creatures. All were shouting or cheering loudly. The robot, which was previously struck by mud, entered the arena and grabbed the black-skinned kid, taking him outside. His two other hands tossed two daggers to Quia and Daichi.



Daichi fell to his knees, pummeling the ground with fists and screaming. The only response was everyone's laughter and whistles.

Quia, on the other hand, picked up her weapon, stating. - "You know what we must do."

Daichi grabbed the dagger, rushed past Quia, and threw the blade at the fat crab, who was watching intently from his throne, devouring a bowl of intestine-shaped flesh. The dagger bounced off a forcefield, and the people at the stands laughed again.

"I WON'T FIGHT FOR YOU!" - Daichi screamed. - "YOU CAN KILL ME."

The creature stopped its feast and looked at the spectators. They all desired bloodshed. - "Let's raise the stakes. The last one alive will gain freedom." - It declared.

Quia held her weapon firmly, but was still trembling. - "I'm sorry... I have to do it." - Daichi heard behind him, and when he turned around, Quia had already tossed a handful of sand at his eyes.

Daichi leaped back, evading the blade by merely an inch, and when he managed to open his eyes, he felt the blade grazing his cheek. Quia didn't know how to fight, and Daichi was aware of that, he grabbed her arm at twisted it, causing her to drop the dagger. When Quia screamed in pain and cursed, Daichi kicked her dagger away.

"What are you doing!?" - He shouted. - "That's what they want!"

Quia looked at Daichi, desperate, but hesitating.

“Give up.” - Quia begged. - “Let me survive. I have a place to return to, you don't.”

Daichi clenched his teeth in anger and punched her with all his strength. The crowd was cheering.

Quira backed off and shapeshifted her arms into two sharp spikes, then screamed. She swung again and again, but Daichi watched her every move with a cold gaze and deliberately dodged the attacks at the last moment.

“Fight!” - Some spectators yelled. - “Hit her again, boy!”

Daichi ignored it and focused, waiting until Quia was too exhausted to fight. Her attacks became slower and slower, and she stopped, realizing her strategy won't work.

“Did you calm down?” - Daichi asked.

“We're both... going to die.” - Quia said quietly and sobbed, attacking Daichi one more time.

He casually sidestepped. - "I know." - Daichi added. - "Do you really think the survival will be worth it? In this hell?"

Quia lifted her eyes.

"...and at what cost?" - Daichi continued.

Quia broke down in tears. - "I... I didn't want to..." - Her head soon rested on Daichi's shoulder.

The crowd booed, and the crab creature was visibly upset.

"It's okay... It's okay..." - Daichi said, stroking her head, but it only took a fraction of a second until he felt a jab under his ribs. He immediately pushed Quia away and noticed his blood on her spike.

The crowd jumped up from their seats, shouting. - "Finish him!"

Quia decided to wait until Daichi bleeds out instead, which made the spectators displeased and impatient. They started to toss items and empty bottles at the forcefield, so the crab raised his hand to silence them, then declared to the fighters. - "I give you four minutes."

Quira threw herself at Daichi in desperation. The boy was barely standing, but still managed to dodge with the same agility as earlier, as if he wasn't wounded at all, even if blood soaked his shirt. When he

sensed an opportunity, he grabbed Quia and, with all his strength, delivered a knee strike to her solar plexus.

The girl fell down, unable to breathe. Daichi felt in his knee that his opponent had extremely hard skin, but it didn't stop him. He jumped at Quia, pinning her down with his body, then began hitting her face. His knuckles quickly reddened from his own blood. Each time Quia tried to defend, Daichi pushed her arms away and punched harder, until the first cracks appeared on her face and yellow liquid trickled out.

Daichi knew that Quia had no strength to fight anymore.

"Is that what you want?" - Daichi whispered, crying, then stood up and picked up the dagger. He slowly walked up to Quia, who, horrified, tried to crawl away from him.

Daichi just grabbed her by the hair and put the blade under her throat. The whole crowd cheered, waiting for the execution.

"Is that what you want?" - Daichi repeated.

"No! Please!" - Quia squealed.

"Ten seconds." - The crab reminded.

Daichi freed the girl's hair, letting her face fall into the sand. He looked at his shirt, the blood slowly dripped down its edge, then tossed the dagger to Quia, saying. - "Choose." - Then spread his arms open and closed his eyes.

Quia wasted no second. Despite her swollen face, she picked up the weapon and attacked. When the blade was merely an inch away from the boy's chest, a sharp gunshot rang out in the air.

Daichi opened his eyes, but all he could see before him were scattered pieces of Quia's crystal body, mixed with her thick, yellow blood. In disbelief, he turned to the crab, who was now holding a pistol.

"The bets are invalidated." - The crab uttered, displeased. - "Patch him up, then send to the cauldron."

In Daichi's eyes, there was more hatred than he had felt in his entire life. When the robot entered the arena, the boy grabbed the dagger and lunged at it, driving the blade into the gap between its torso and shoulder. It disabled the robot's arm, but wouldn't stop the paralyzing gun, which once again rendered Daichi unconscious.