

Last Star 37

Star XVI ~ Dream Set Sail ~ Part III

Avi woke up in Daichi's memories again. He was sitting inside an industrial container, gagged and chained to its wall. In front of him was the black-skinned child, who still couldn't recover from what they had done. They stared at Daichi, who was still covered in yellow blood.

"Now you understand." - The kid replied. - "What we have to do to survive."

The container's door opened, and a robot entered, followed by an android. The first machine pointed at both boys, saying. - "Take these two, they are in the best shape."

The android separated their shackles from the walls, then grabbed both prisoners under its arms. He entered a vast hallway, above which hundreds of outlaws were occupying many steel bridges. It was a pretty busy area, and some Flesh Hunters peacefully smoked their cigars, leaning over the railings and trying to catch a breath between their missions. Somewhere else, a group of oppressors was brutally kicking one of their former brothers. On another platform, a hunter shot his companion dead during an argument, and on the lowest level, people were betting on dice. Hot steam was escaping the damaged pipes in some places, and coolant was dripping everywhere. On top of that, the smell of cheap alcohol was everywhere.

The android stepped over the bridge railing, then dropped nine meters down onto another platform, and continued walking.

"Where are you carrying them, princess? They don't look like butchery material." - A purple-skinned woman with tentacle hair and a nosering tried to get the man's attention.

“Not your business.” - The android said with stoic calm.

In the blink of an eye, the woman pulled out a laser razor and put it under the android's chin. - “...and I'm asking so nicely... You wouldn't refuse to provide some information to such a lovely lady.” - She came closer and licked the android's cheek. - “I'll make it up to you.” - She whispered in his ear.

“I can't think of anything I would rather do than exchange even more germs and microbes.” - The android said sarcastically. - “Make way, please.”

“Please...?” - The woman laughed and let him go. - “These manners... we're lacking men like you here.”

Android continued, ignoring being slapped on the butt. He jumped onto a nearby pipe, then slid down it, above vats full of green acid, a few levels lower, then landed on a steel grating, where, between burning barrels, other hunters were warming their bodies. He arrived at a double gate locked by three bolts and brought his eye close to the scanner, opening it. One more empty corridor and he was there, in the crab's office.

Daichi started thrashing like never before and mumbling incoherently through the gag.

“Untie the black one.” - The crab spoke.

Android silently followed his order.

"I have a task for you two." - The crab began. - "We have some parasites on the ship, we either exterminate them... or feed them. It's up to you, what option you choose. Understood?"

The black-skinned boy nodded.

The crab gestured to the android to continue, and the man approached a wooden, decaying shelf, removing a scroll with a map. He unrolled it, revealing old blueprints of a garbage dump.

"The swarm has their nest somewhere here..." - The crab moved its dirty fingernail across the paper. - "I don't care how, you will get rid of it. If you succeed, I'll think about relocating you... and talk some sense into your friend. I have... high expectations for him." - He then raised his hand, sending the android and boys out.

While they walked to the next area, the black-skinned boy was relatively free, while Daichi was still tied. When the trio arrived at the garbage dump, the android pushed the first boy into a vertical shaft, then unshackled Daichi and threw him in there too. After this, he tossed them two spears made of dark-red steel and jagged tips.

"The exit is behind the nest." - The android added. - "You don't have much choice."

Daichi removed his gag and looked at the man with hatred, but when the boy realized what situation he was in, he said nothing and grabbed the spear, biting his lower lip until it bled, then moved into the tunnel, not paying attention to anything anymore.

The black-skinned boy grabbed his weapon and caught up to him, but Daichi shoved him, saying. - "Get lost, murderer."

"Hey!" - The other boy replied, grabbing Daichi's tattered shirt and pushing him against the wall. - "Who do you think you are?"

Daichi lost it and punched his peer right in the face. The black-skinned boy grabbed his cheek, shocked, then dropped his spear and lunged at Daichi in fury, who simply grabbed the enemy's arm to stop the attack, then delivered a precise headbutt right to the opponent's nose. The other boy staggered backward, pressing his hand against his now bleeding face.

"I said, get lost." - Daichi repeated, way louder.

"Do you think that I wanted to do it?!" - The black-skinned boy was in tears.

"I don't care about your excuses." - Daichi answered.

"You aren't better than me in any way, you had to do it too!" - His companion protested.

Daichi clenched his fists. - "I didn't kill anyone."

"Then... how?" - The other boy uttered. - "They would kill you! Don't lie to my face!"

Daichi just grabbed his spear and left without saying anything more.

“You want to leave me, just like that?” - The black-skinned kid shouted. - “We'll both die here if we don't cooperate, you know it!”

Daichi, however, kept walking, leaving him behind.

Making his way through the sewers, Daichi rummaged through the scraps of food to fill his stomach, finding only chewed bones. That was enough to him, he broke them in half then sucked the marrow out, and continued walking.

One after another, he crawled through vents, jumped down the rotating gears that filled a seemingly endless chasm, waded through deep, cold water used to cool the reactors, climbed wet rods, then wandered through unused and forgotten gaps between ship walls.

Above Daichi, it was possible to hear silent echoes of someone's torment, like there was a torture chamber or Butchery there. He arrived at a square room with no visible ceiling, everywhere there was an odor of rotting meat and blood.

As Daichi continued walking, his legs were submerged in a dark liquid, and on the edges of the room, there were piles of bones mixed with rejected organs. Daichi tried to hold his tears, he also felt like he was about to vomit.

Amid unidentified screams, Daichi heard the first squeal of an unknown creature. He grabbed his spear firmly, then narrowed his eyes. The dim light of wall lamps revealed a rat-like shape covered in sharp, silver quills. The boy sneaked closer, then closer, until the animal lifted its ears and turned to him, revealing a round mouth surrounded by tendrils and filled to the brim with teeth. The rat attacked immediately, like it was rabid, but Daichi aimed at its maw and pierced the animal straight through.

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To his surprise, the weapon cut through the animal's steel quills like it was butter. Daichi examined the corpse carefully, then tore a part of his shirt off and hid the spike in a makeshift bag.

As Daichi continued, he occasionally met more rats, but he could defend himself quite well. The only thing that worried him was the presence of their nest. He had no idea how to safely pass next to it, or how to destroy it. It was located in a vertical shaft, similar to the one that Daichi was initially dropped to, so it was possible to easily scout the area from above. When the boy arrived, he studied what was at the bottom. It was a pile of bones glued together by hardened, yellow vomit. Around it, there were dozens of creatures, but Daichi was sure more of them waited inside the nest.

He turned back to look for a solution, but then he noticed that the black-skinned boy was catching up to him. The kid approached Daichi and, without uttering a word, looked at the nest, walked back a few meters, crouched, and observed Daichi until, without a warning, he aimed his spear at him.

"What are you doing!?" - Daichi shouted, preparing his own weapon.

"Do you still not understand!!?" - The black-skinned boy said. - "It's another trial!"

Daichi backed away, reconsidering alternatives. - "What is this about!? Calm down!"

"Are you blind or dumb? We can't exterminate them! The only way through is to distract them." - The black-skinned boy was forcing Daichi closer to the pit. - "Only one of us is leaving alive."

"You are crazy!" - Daichi felt that there was only a step more until he would fall. - "There must be something here that will help us." - He tried to convince the boy.

"There is nothing here, you already know it well." - The other boy hissed and stabbed at Daichi's right side, then at the left, then at the head. Daichi dodged it all and swept the opponent's legs out with his own spear.

His enemy quickly tried to get up, but the tip of Daichi's weapon was already aiming at his face. - "You lost." - Daichi stated.

"...and what will you do... kill me?" - The black-skinned boy mocked him.

Daichi moved the tip closer. - "Do you really want to try me?"

His opponent sensed it was a bluff and grabbed the spear's shaft, not letting it move or push any closer. He got up, and it was a stalemate, as they both were of similar strength and neither was letting go of the weapon.

“Okay... listen... we don't have to solve it this way.” - Daichi spoke.

“The hope is lost, and you want to talk?” - The boy said. - “Don't make me laugh.”

“We're not moving anywhere, we have time.” - Daichi argued.

“Forgive me, but...” - The boy's white tattoos began to glow, and his muscles grew larger. - “...you are wrong!” - He lifted both the spear and Daichi, who immediately let the weapon go, seeing what could possibly happen if he didn't.

The black-skinned boy smiled confidently, spinning the spear in his hands, then spat on the floor. - “Die!” - He shouted once more, stabbing at Daichi numerous times and pushing him to the edge. When the spearhead flashed brightly on Daichi's right side, he grabbed it under his armpit and leaned his whole body over the pit so that gravity would wrench the weapon from the opponent's hand.

Without any other choice, the other boy freed the spear, confident that Daichi was about to fall into the nest. He soon heard rat squeaks, who exited their lair to devour their to-be victim, so he came closer to jump down and run while the parasites were busy, but when he was close to the edge of the pit, Daichi grabbed his leg. The spear was stuck in the top of the mound, and Daichi used the weapon's flexibility to launch himself like a pole vaulter. The black-skinned boy lost his footing, slipping in a stream of blood that flowed down the cliff, and his skull crashed against its steel edge. They both fell down, right next to the nest.

Daichi, bruised, got up as fast as he could. The noises of the alarmed swarm were getting closer. His eyes turned to his former opponent, who rolled a bit closer to the parasite habitat, and he noticed a bleeding wound on his skull. The kid was barely conscious and struggling to prop himself up on his elbows.

Daichi couldn't even shout for him to run, because the swarm already leaped at the boy with its teeth, starting to tear his skin and flesh away. Daichi rushed to escape, hearing nothing but a terrifying scream, and when he turned his gaze, he saw a hand raised above the pile of rat bodies that pressed down on the victim, but the arm soon fell, lifeless.

Even if the creatures were busy devouring the unlucky boy, a few of them chased Daichi, who ran inside a tunnel to his left, then slid down its slanted floor. He stopped at a narrow grating and squeezed through to the main hallway, while the rats simply passed between the steel bars. Daichi continued to jump over the blocks of protruding steel that blocked his path and slid inside a half-closed airlock, at the end of which there was a light. When he reached it, however, there was only another vertical shaft. He had to stop, and knowing there was no longer any escape, he raised his fists and screamed, ready to fight. Three rats jumped at him, but he kicked the first one, sending it at the wall. When the two others were about to bite him, two yellow laser beams flashed from above Daichi, incinerating the parasites into dust.

Daichi looked up, where the familiar android was sitting, waiting with a pistol and a rope, which he soon tossed down, then nodded for Daichi to hurry. The boy didn't wait until the man changed his mind and used the last ounces of his strength to climb to the top, where he, all sweaty and panting, lay down to rest.

Android examined Daichi from head to toe, then half-smiled - "Let's go." - and started to walk back. Daichi, knowing how dangerous other passengers were, didn't even think about attempting to run away. Now, he had only one goal.

Daichi was back in the office of the fat crab monstrosity. It lightly raised its brew and smiled.

"Do you still plan to escape?" - The crab spoke directly to Daichi.

"No." - Daichi hissed through his teeth, in his eyes, there was hatred.

"I see... I see... your eyes speak for themselves. The desire blood." - The crab added. - "Soon or later, you will become one of us."

Daichi clenched his fists. - "I will never be like you."

"Oh... really?" - The crab scratched his chin, then smiled again. He activated a device on his desk, which was apparently a holographic camera. Daichi heard a familiar scream. - "You dropped him right in the middle of the swarm. Don't tell us that his blood isn't on your hands."

"I..." - Daichi stammered. - "...no, that's different. It was an accident."

"An accident?" - The crab laughed. - "...and you, pummeling that poor girl in the arena, was an accident too? No, you did it because you wanted to."

"SHUT UP!" - Daichi screamed, tears started rolling down his face.

“Ohh...?” - The crab slammed his left hand onto the desk and brought his face closer. - “Are you complaining that I left you alive back then?”

“Why... why did you kill her, not me?” - Daichi uttered.

“It's simple. She stopped instead of killing you.” - The crab said.

Daichi felt something break inside him. He lunged at the monster's face and drove the rat's spike straight into its eye. The crab screamed, hurling the kid at the wall. In a corner of his eye, Daichi could see how the creature held a gun that was concealed under the task for all this time, then pulled the trigger.

Daichi closed his eyes, ready for the worst, but moments passed, and nothing was happening. He only heard the crab cursing. - “I know that treacherous, lying bastard would try to kill me one day.” - When Daichi checked what happened, he noticed that the android had a hole in its body, as large as half of its torso. Next to a corpse was another gun.

Daichi's heart skipped a beat, and he jumped to the pistol, but before his fingers could touch its handle, a huge cleaver slammed into the floor, blocking his hand.

“Don't even think about it.” - The crab said, still bleeding. - “The eye can be replaced, you not.” - He pressed a button under the desk, opening a hidden passage. - “From today on, you are staying away from that bunch of stinking slackers. You'll meet the matriarch and serve her. It doesn't matter if you like it or not.”

At this point, the memory was over. Luna knelt in front of Avi, held her gently, and helped her up.

“Are you feeling alright?” - Luna asked.

“That was... horrible, Luna.” - Avi uttered. - “...but I know his name.”

“You'll tell me everything later.” - Luna said. - “Do you want to sit down somewhere?”

“Yes... Yes.” - Avi confirmed, and Luna led her to the chairs.

The guide was still peeking from behind the counter. It irritated Luna.

“You are selling 'dreams'? What a joke! She's barely alive!” - Luna shouted.

“I... only give what you most desire, what you ask for yourselves.” - The entity said.

Luna glowed brightly with fury, but Avi touched her hand, then waved her head. - “Luna, don't be angry. Maybe I didn't learn a lot, but it was precisely what I've asked for.” - She then turned to the guide. - “Thank you for your service.”

"Ooo... the pleasure is all mine." - The creature poked its head out from behind the counter. - "How nice... that somebody here appreciates my job."

"Hmpf." - Luna crossed her arms and looked at the pod. - "Are you sure it's safe?"

"I don't know." - Avi answered. - "I felt everything that the traveler did... and sometimes, it really hurt. You must be prepared for everything."

"I can handle it." - Luna assured, still concerned about Avi, but confident. - "Rest here, I'm going in."

"I'll wait for you, Luna. Good luck."

Luna entered the pod, her last glance focused on Avi. She collapsed to the floor and fell asleep.