

Last Star 73

Star XXIX ~ Last Train Home

After one and a half days, Luna's spaceship stopped at the twenty-ninth star system. Avi was still mad at Nicolas, so they avoided talking to each other.

Looking at the map, Avi pressed on the objects in space one by one to scan them. The star was a typical yellow sun, similar to the Earth one, but two energy-collecting megastructures were constructed on its poles, creating a large forcefield around the entire system.

"What would they need it for?" - Avi asked Luna.

"Don't you remember? The next system is Anaari's territory. The weapons were delivered here. You can figure out the rest of the story." - Luna replied.

"Do you think it's safe here?" - Avi asked.

"The force field is still intact." - Luna pointed out. - "It's durable and will withstand fire from interstellar weapons... but I'm still anxious about one thing."

"What exactly?" - Avi inquired.

"If Astronauts were here, they would tell us not to enter their space a long time ago... or something like that." - Luna explained. - "They had to evacuate for some reason."

Avi kept scanning. - "No planets, only a protoplanetary disk."

Luna glanced at the rows of shifting numbers on terminals under the map. - "Not quite. It's metal scraps."

"Scraps?" - Avi asked.

"A destroyed fleet." - Luna clarified. - "Apparently, there was a large-scale battle here."

"...so it's another graveyard..." - Avi's expression became sadder. - "...but this time, it's unrelated to Necrosis."

"The stars ignited the life within them, and when the stars went out, they returned it to them." - Luna commented, then sat down on a map platform, rotating the hologram around its vertical axis. - "Where should we land?"

"Wherever." - Avi said and activated the short-jump engines. - "I'll pray for them, that's all we can do."

Avi manoeuvred between the wreckage, staring at them from behind the window. She was pondering the absurdity of wars, about how many lives could be saved if people were willing to cooperate, and about how trivial the things that divide us are in the face of death.

She stopped in the glow of the sun, at a place where its warm beams still pierced through the twisted sheets of metal.

Virka, Nicolas, Charlotte, and Luna entered the bridge, wearing their spacesuits. Despite Avi being the one to call them, she was now being late.

“Are you coming?” - Luna asked.

Avi looked at the former war zone, beyond its outer edge, where the space was vast, empty, and peaceful. - “Yes... a second, please.”

The transporter landed in a tear in the steel that led to the side of a small frigate, set apart from other ships of its class by two red stripes and red flags featuring a symbol of a black scythe. It wasn't as large as its counterparts, that is, flagships of titan-class, which were a few dozen miles long, but it was also a flagship, one responsible for the smaller units.

As they traversed the dark corridors, Avi and her companions passed many corpses in auburn spacesuits. Some were lying on the stair steps in pools of frozen blood, others were resting against the hole-riddled walls, and some were suspended in the air due to a lack of gravity. Luna occasionally had to unlock the

door, which proved to be difficult due to the still-working security systems, but once she found an access card, it became easier.

When they finally arrived at the bridge, they could see a large breach in its hardened frontal window, beyond which it was possible to notice the full scale of destruction. Wrecks reached as far as the horizon itself, slowly drifting in the orange afterglow.

The command chair was occupied by a deceased woman in an auburn trench coat with gilded fringes on the bottom. There was a pistol and a saber next to her. Although she was dead, her body seemed untouched by time, likely due to cybernetic implants.

Avi gently closed the woman's eyes, then walked to the prow, where she folded her hands in prayer. - "May the starlight guide your souls to a place of happiness and peace. May we meet there together, rekindling the connection we once shared."

Luna, instead, kept herself busy. She used the captain's card to access the main console. It wasn't enough to read all the spaceship's logs, but she found a backdoor created by Anaari, which made the hacking easier, mainly due to her being one of them.

Luna didn't like what she had found, but she decided to keep it secret until she could talk with Avi privately.

However, Virka approached her, aware that Luna's mood had changed. - "Did you find something important?" - She asked, curious.

Luna looked at Nicolas and Charlotte, who joined Avi in her prayers. - "It'll need to wait."

“Ah... okay. I understand.” - Virka gently moved her tails in slow motion. - “Forget it, I won't interfere.”

When Avi was done praying and her parents left to look around, she once again gazed at the far space, contemplating her own mortality, and added. - “Our prayers, barely shimmering afar, fade like candles in the dark. Yet, I ask, do not turn away from those who still shed tears.”

When she returned to her companions, they were discussing the next step of their journey.

“We should let the dead rest. There's no point in disrupting the silence of this place.” - Charlotte continued.

Virka coldly disagreed. - “These are merely empty shells. They won't look at us or judge us, even if we loot this place.”

Luna preferred to avoid fights. - “Either way, aside from their logbooks, we won't find much here.”

Nicolas noticed Avi, who anxiously walked towards them, listening to their talk. - “What's your opinion, Avi?” - He asked. - “Are you ready to go back, or do you still want to look around?”

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"We can go back." - Avi quietly informed.

The same devastated corridors were passed through once more in silence. The transporter was on its way to Luna's spaceship, leaving behind not even a memory of those who had visited this place.

After coming back, Luna waited until the evening for a moment when she could talk with Avi in private. She found her in her room, reading the scriptures that Jaquel gave her.

Although Luna had an aversion to it and considered it nonsense, she still wanted to at least appear interested in what Avi was doing.

"Is it interesting?" - She asked.

"Very. It's not just their beliefs, but also a chronicle of old times. I'm still reading the Genesis. It's describing the creation of the world by mixing the light and darkness, as an analogy to the aether and nether. From the tides of these two forces, order and chaos were to emerge, and with them, a boundary that separated the primordial seas and defined the nature of the sky, sea, and earth. It also explains that the origins of life occurred prior to those events."

Luna sat next to Avi, reluctantly listening.

“It says that there are two types of souls, those born of light and those born of darkness. The book doesn't say a lot about the latter ones, because they exist outside of this dimension. The first souls were the most magnificent of beings, who, as they pilgrimaged, gave birth to all the plants in the sea and on the land, and when they reached the skies, from their cosmic dance emerged the cradles of stars, called galaxies and nebulae, as well as falling stars and supernovae. The fragments of the latter ones gave birth to life.”

“Do you believe these stories?” - Luna asked. - “They've no scientific basis and are just a collection of beliefs and legends.”

Avi wasn't sure what to answer. - “I like them, it's a beautiful metaphor of how we see and explain the world... and who knows, there might be a grain of truth to it.”

“Ehh... I'm not going to discourage you from it if it makes you happy. Although I prefer to learn about the world through research and studying the facts.” - Luna mentioned.

“Even if you studied the world for eternity, you still wouldn't be able to grasp all of the truths.” - Avi said. - “Some things require faith.”

“Is that your opinion, or did you read it in your little book?” - Luna asked.

“Half and half.” - Avi answered. - “This world is finite, but there are still entities and concepts that go beyond its nature.”

“That doesn't indicate that they can't be studied.” - Luna said. - “Why couldn't we surpass our finite nature by drawing from an infinite source?”

Avi was at a loss for words, unable to refute. - “Do you really think that all the truths can be revealed?”

“I don't know. The mathematical models don't indicate it. There will always be something new, and I'm not able to see if there is a method that will allow us to decipher the nature of everything.” - Luna admitted. - “Although I would like to believe that there exists one.”

“You would like to believe?” - Avi inquired.

“It's hard to have free will if everything can be calculated in a finite time.” - Luna said. - “To simplify, all our behaviors could be described by an algorithm, and we would merely be passive observers.”

“That's surely not true. Our choices matter and are more than simply a byproduct of experiences.” - Avi declared.

“There's no evidence of it.”

“Your immortal soul is the evidence.” - Avi stated. - “It's the source of everything that can't be explained – free will, consciousness, conscience, identity, life.”

Luna sighed. - “I can tell you're already indoctrinated.”

"Phi, and I can tell you limit understanding to what is superficial." - Avi countered.

"Maybe, but that doesn't mean I'm not right about you. Every civilization has a book that explains the genesis of life. For every explanation, you'll find an alternative hypothesis. How do you plan to make sense of all this?" - Luna asked.

"I'll look at what connects everyone, and at what divides us, and that's how I'll arrive at the answer." - Avi decided.

"...or you'll get tangled in a web of contradictions." - Luna sighed again.

"No, because my heart will know the truth and separate it from the lies." - Avi argued.

"There are as many truths as there are people." - Luna stated. - "The heart isn't infallible."

"The truths that can't be questioned are enough." - Avi replied, then blushed. - "You should know." - She averted her head, sulking a little.

Luna raised her eyebrow.

“The feelings I have for you are true.” - Avi uttered quietly. - “I love you with all my soul.”

Luna didn't notice the moment when she also blushed upon noticing Avi's cute expression, but then she started giggling.

“What's so fun about it!?” - Avi exclaimed, bright red all over.

“No... It's nothing, I just... surrender and admit you're right.” - Luna replied. - “I love you, too, and it's a truth that can't be reduced to numbers and equations.”

Avi closed Jaquel's book and put it on her shelf. - “Uhm, well... and I think I don't need these stories to see it.”

Luna kissed Avi's cheek gently and snuggled up to her.

Both girls were spending their time together in silence, simply happy with being there. Later, they started to reminisce about the times when they met and noticed the first moments when their feelings began to bloom.

“I feel like I've known you all my life.” - Avi declared.

"I feel the same."

Avi checked the clock. It was already a late night, and the next star was close. She recalled the destination of their journey and grew concerned.

Luna noticed it and made an easy guess. - "Are you thinking about tomorrow?"

Avi nodded. - "Do you still want to go there?"

"We made a promise." - Luna replied.

Avi strengthened her resolve. - "Let's forget about the promise for a moment. Do you still want to go there?"

Luna looked at her, mostly surprised, then pondered for a long, silent moment.

"Yes." - She stated. - "I must face it."

"Whatever happens, I'm with you." - Avi assured. - "We'll face Anaari and the world together."

Luna, however, was still worried.

“Luna?” - Avi asked.

“I'm scared.” - Luna admitted.

Avi hugged Luna to comfort her, and Luna just stared at the photo of them.

After a longer moment, she said. - “So many memories, so many reconciliations and moments of happiness. I'm praying that I'll be able to convince them to show them what they try to take. I don't know why they try to separate us, why I would have to sacrifice myself.”

“Do you think it has something to do with Necrosis?” - Avi asked.

“No, I don't think so.” - Luna uttered. - “To be honest, I've been meaning to talk to you about this from the very beginning.”

Avi was all ears.

“There... back at the astronaut's destroyed fleet, I found plans of a soul-killing weapon, but it was a large-scale one. They tried to build it in the previous system, but were attacked by Anaari, who stopped their efforts.” - Luna explained. - “If they completed their project, they would be able to connect directly to the psyche field of all living beings, and not only locate every single one of them, but also neutralize them forever. This weapon... it has the potential to erase all the life in the universe. I... I never thought something like this could exist.”

Avi shed a tear. - “Horrible.”

“...we shouldn't have trusted them.” - Luna whispered.

Avi averted her eyes. - “If I made a different choice, my parents...”

“I know, Avi. I know.” - Luna said. - “I assume Anaari need me to protect themselves from that weapon or from the witch... but I think it's the first. They were training me for so long, and I still have no idea why.”

“They want to use you.” - Avi replied. - “To save their own skins.”

“Avi.” - Luna's expression became serious. - “What if... they are right?”

“What?”

“One sacrificed life can save many.” - Luna uttered.

“Don't even think about this!” - Avi shouted. - “They're not worth it after everything they have done!”

“Avi, you're quick to judge...” - Luna stated. - “...but there must be innocents among them. If I could still save someone... I... I have no idea what I'm supposed to do.”

Avi grabbed Luna's arms and shook her gently. - “Do you want to be just a tool in their war!? Anaari and Astronauts have to reconcile and recall the good in us. It's the only correct option.”

“I would like it to be this way.” - Luna whispered.

“It'll be like this! If we have to, we'll force them to listen!” - Avi declared loudly.

“I admire you...” - Luna said. - “...and your faith.” - She leaned on Avi's shoulder, saying nothing more.