Last Star 74

Star XXX ~ Doctrine of Fundamentally Good ~ Part I

The spaceship stopped at the edge of the thirtieth star system, ruled by Anaari, which was full of black hornets. Avi and Luna were already waiting at the bridge to have the situation under control. Still camouflaged, Avi scanned the system to gather intel.

Encompassing the red dwarf were matrices that intensified its light emission. Similar to the previous star system, there were no planets here, but Luna suspected that they had been dismantled to produce the defensive structures and the fleet. However, the latter one had already retreated, leaving the system relatively empty, except for a single space station in the shape of a pillar, surrounded by three rings of steel.

That was the place where Avi was going to land.

"We should gather the data first." - Luna declared. - "There are too many hornets to contact Anaari directly. If we do that, we'll instantly reveal our position."

"Do you think that our camouflage will work once we exit the ship?" - Avi asked.

"It'll be better to use your multitask cell. If you can hide the ship, then you'll probably be able to hide us, too." - Luna stated.

"Uhm... I'll try." - Avi uttered.

When their spaceship was in the decks, Luna remotely examined the security. - "It's well-encrypted."

"...but can you do it?" - Avi asked.

"N-" - Luna wanted to deny, but all the lights on their spaceship went out, replaced by alarm's buzzing.

"W-what's going on!?" - Avi shouted, panicked.

Luna illuminated the terminals with her light, rapidly analyzing the readings. - "I'm sorry! They've tracked me down!"

"How!?" - Avi exclaimed.

"I'm working on finding that out!" - Luna shouted and leaned over the screens, repeating. - "Stars... stars... what am I supposed to do?"

Avi screamed again, now in fear. Luna quickly turned and noticed that the cell that was merged with the ship began to leak out of the crevices like black tar, slowly dripping from the walls and ceilings.

"Avi! You have to make a dive and save it!" - Luna ordered.

"A dive!?" - Avi shouted. - "You must be kidding me!"

"Why is there an alarm!?" - Nicolas shouted as he entered the bridge in a hurry. Virka and Charlotte followed him.

"It's my fault, I got us into trouble..." - Luna hastily explained. - "...but whatever happens now, I ask you not to interrupt us. Avi will handle it."

"How!?" - Avi shouted.

"Focus. We'll do it like we did it the first time." - Luna instructed. - "It might be more difficult, so hold my hands firmly and don't let them go."

Avi hesitantly allowed Luna to take her hands.

"Close your eyes and imagine walking underwater." - Luna continued.

"Right away!?" - Avi asked.

"Yes! There is no time!" - Luna rushed. - "...and don't get scared!"

Avi screamed at the top of her lungs. She was surrounded by darkness, her ankles submerged in a black, thick, and cold slime that seemed to have no end in sight. Slowly, it climbed her legs.

"For heaven's sake!" - Nicolas quickly approached. - "What are you doing!?"

"DON'T INTERRUPT!" - Luna warned.

"Luna! Get me out of here!" - Avi yelled, panicked.

"FOCUS!" - Luna asked again. - "Look around and tell me what you see!"

"It's like in my nightmares! Blackness, blackness everywhere!" - Avi was on the verge of tears. - "It's so cold, too. I can't feel my feet."

"IGNORE IT!" - Luna demanded. - "Tell me only what you see. Is there anything other than that black thing?"

"No... no, I don't think so." - Avi uttered.

"What are Anaari plotting...?" - Luna whispered, then spoke to Avi. - "Is that ooze moving or acts in any characteristic way!?"

"It's all... fluctuating." - Avi informed.

"Got it!" - Luna shouted. - "Imagine that all of the fluctuations are concentrating in a single spot."

Avi listened, and a drop-shaped mass started to form in front of her.

"W-what's next!?" - Avi spoke, her voice nervously breaking.

"I'll figure that out soon." - Luna looked at the tar in their room, which also seemed to concentrate in a single spot under Avi. - "Virka!"

Virka rushed to help.

"Give me the readings at the diagnostic terminal number four." - Luna requested.

Virka, without a second thought, began to read. - "Error code – AH61. Error code – RC09. Error code – TI9E. That's everything."

"Thank you." - Luna said. - "Avi, focus again. You have to control the ooze. Use it to form three rings around you."

Avi tried her best, and the black liquid formed two rings, but the third one quickly broke and dispersed. - "Luna... there are only two. I've tried to make a third, but I've failed. I can't try again."

"Don't worry about it. We'll have to find a workaround." - Luna comforted Avi, despite knowing that it would be a big issue later on. - "Now, try to split the rings into six equal parts and let each one break away and rise higher, then reshape into spheres. The one in front of you will be assigned the number one."

Avi did as requested. - "It's ready."

"Push the first inner sphere to the first outer one." - Luna said.

When Avi did it, the spheres merged, and their blackness was replaced by white light.

"I think it works..." - Avi uttered.

"Now, the next to your right, into the next to the right." - Luna requested.

Another sphere of light formed.

"The first to the left, to the next to the right." - Luna continued. - "Then, the previous one to the left, into the next to the right."

When Avi was done, a rain of light began to pour, creating white ripples in the tar. They gradually grew larger and merged, pushing the darkness away.

"Luna, it works!" - Avi shouted.

"We're not done." - Luna warned. - "Stay vigilant."

The ground beneath Avi began to shake, and obsidian obelisks formed, then a black tar oozed from their tops. The color and position of Avi's light spheres reset.

"Luna, it appears to be resisting us!" - Avi shouted.

"Just continue to do what I say." - Luna requested.

As Avi continued to follow Luna's instructions, the obelisks began to crack and crumble, and from their falling pieces white twigs began to grow. The rivers of tar disappeared, but right after, the sky thundered, and the rain of light was replaced by falling, black cockroaches. Avi felt them hitting her body and slowly bit into her skin, just as they did with the white twigs.

Avi began to cry. - "Luna! I know this feeling! Please, stop this!"

"One more set of instructions and we're done." - Luna tried to calm her down.

"It hurts." - Avi added in a breaking voice.

"Hurts...?" - Luna uttered in disbelief. - "It has no right to hurt... focus on the warmth of my hands. I'm pulling you out!"

Avi felt Luna's hands, but once the warmth began to rise, the ooze climbed up to her knees, nullifying it.

Luna felt that Avi's hands were terrifyingly cold. - "Avi!? Avi!? Are you alright!?"

"Luna, it's cold... so cold. I'm scared. Pull me out." - Avi begged.

Luna was running thousands of simulations in hurry. - "Avi. I'm sorry, but I see no other option. You've to finish what we've started. Fourth inner sphere to your right, into the second outer to your right."

Avi touched the sphere with her fingers, filling it with light, but as she did so, her index finger crumbled and fell off.

"Luna... I'm falling apart..." - Avi sobbed. - "Help me, please..."

"Continue! You can do it!" - Luna instructed.

Avi reached for the next spheres. She felt larger and larger pieces break away from her body.

"Luna... I'll die here." - Avi whispered faintly.

"It's the last two! You've got this!" - Luna shouted, still hopeful.

"..." - Avi didn't answer.

"Avi? Reply, please." - Luna yelled. - "Avi!!"

Before Avi collapsed to the ground, Luna caught her. In one moment, all the lights on the spaceship were working again, and the cell returned back into the spaceship.

Nicolas and Charlotte hurried to them, calling their daughter, but she wouldn't react. There was no breath or blood circulation.

"What... what did you do to her?" - Nicolas uttered, unaware that tears were already rolling down his face.

Luna's lips trembled. She couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"No..." - She whispered. - "No... It's not over." - She placed Avi on the floor and put her mouth to hers.

Two breaths in. Thirty chest compressions.

Avi felt like she was drowning, and the cold and pain merged into one, suppressing her senses, as though she were fading away. She was surrounded only by blackness, her hand reaching for something above her.

"Not yet." - She thought to herself and submerged her fingers in the tar, touching what remained of the last sphere.

The darkness disappeared, revealing a sterile room of infinite white. Avi's body collapsed to the floor. Tired, she opened her eyes. She looked at her legs and arms, they were whole again. Still, something unsettled her – right before her, the last drop of black ooze fluctuated.

Avi stood up, calling - "Luna!?" - but there was no answer, so she knelt before the tar and stared at it, only to soon scream. - "What are you!? LEAVE ME ALONE!"

The ooze reacted, withdrawing. It grew, forming an oval shape from which arms and legs took shape. The new creature looked at its limbs, but they were bubbling and changing shapes constantly, as if they were unsure what kind of form to assume. At some point, the head turned to Avi, its black eyes studying the girl from Earth.

"LEAVE!" - Avi shouted.

The entity retreated a few steps, unsure what or who was in front of her. - "Hurts." - Seemed to echo from its gurgling throat.

Avi bit her lip. She wanted to scream. She wanted to pour all her hatred onto the creature. Instead, she stopped herself and asked again. - "Who are you?"

"Who... am I?" - The creature repeated, gazing at its hands, then at Avi.

The black shape began to form into something solid, which soon resembled Avi.

"You're not me! Don't pretend to be me!!" - Avi shouted, angry.

The creature didn't understand any of her words. Instead, it asked in a voice no different than Avi's. - "Who are you?"

"Avi. Remember my name." - Avi hissed.

"Name." - The creature whispered. - "Avi."

"No. I'm Avi. YOU'RE NOT ME." - Avi angrily explained.

"What's my name?" - The entity asked.

Avi replied with content for Anaari and their weapon. - "I doubt that your creators gave you any."

"I... I need a name." - The entity said.

"Then find one." - Avi answered.

"Avi... Avi..." - The entity repeated as it started at its hands.

"Forget!!!" - Avi yelled, causing the creature to take a step back. - "You want a name!? Fine, I'll give you one. Eva, you're Eva now."

"Eva." - The entity looked at Avi, disoriented. - "E-v-a."

"Yes, you're Eva, I'm Avi..." - Avi continued to explain. - "...and now, you better tell me how to get out of here."

"Get out?" - Eva looked around the empty room.

"Yes." - Avi said. - "I want to go back to my friends."

Eva tilted her head, askingly. - "Friend?"

Avi wanted to say that the creature wouldn't understand, but she stopped herself, recalling what Nicolas told her during their last argument.

"What is 'friend'?" - Eva asked.

Avi sighed. She was exhausted and irritated. - "It's someone you're deeply connected to."

"Connected... connected... connection." - Eva calculated. She looked at Avi, then at herself, then at Avi again. - "Connection...creators."

"NO! ANAARI ARE NOT FRIENDS!" - Avi shouted right away.

"No?" - Eva uttered.

"No." - Avi repeated.

"Connection... Avi... friend?" - Eva asked.

Avi was thinking to herself – forget about it, but bit her lips and said. - "You tried to hurt me! Don't you remember!? You don't hurt friends!"

"Connection... not hurt. Acknowledged." - Eva replied.

Avi didn't care at all. She got up and looked around. She didn't want to be next to Eva any longer. - "There must be an exit somewhere." - She began walking onward and passed Eva, who also got up and started following her.

Avi, even if furious about it, decided to pay no attention to it.

"Where are you going?" - Eva asked.

Avi didn't answer, so Eva ran ahead and stopped at the distance. With her hand raised to her forehead, she scanned the surroundings, then turned to Avi and waved to her.

Avi observed her from afar and managed to cool off. - "Eh, what are you looking for?" - She asked, only slightly irritated.

"Thump-thump! Thump-thump!" - Eva repeated loudly.

Avi's eyes opened wide. - "Thump... thump?"

"Yes. Thump-thump! Can't you hear it?" - Eva asked, flabbergasted.

When Avi focused, she realized she also could hear it. Although there was no source of sound anywhere.

"Thump-thump! Thump-thump!" - Eva continued, twirling to the rhythm.

"What's that sound coming from?" - Avi uttered.

Eva stopped and put her hand against her chest. - "Thump... thump?"

Avi immediately noticed that her heart began to beat.

"Luna!?" - Avi shouted.

"Luna...?" - Eva repeated.

Avi paid no attention to it. - "Luna!? Are you there!!?"

Eva mimicked her in her own way. - "Luna! Lu-una! Luna-a!"

"You can do it, Avi." - Avi whispered and recalled the technique that Luna taught her. She focused on her hands, but felt no warmth.

Eva was suspiciously silent, so Avi directed her eyes at the girl, who was now holding her fingers next to her lips. - "Hu-uah."

Avi noticed she could now breathe. She only wondered why Eva was able to sense everything first. - "Eva. Are you feeling something else?" - She asked.

"Warmth." - Eva informed.

"Warmth? Where?" - Avi asked.

Eva extended her hands to Avi, who still felt unsure if she should interact with the weapon. Ultimately, she decided to touch her just with the tip of her index finger and immediately felt a heat so intense that if not for her current form, she would surely be burned.

Eva withdrew her hand. - "Cold." - She whispered to herself. - "Why is Avi cold?"

"Why am I not feeling anything...?" - Avi uttered, panicked.

"Connection..." - Eva said. - "...broken?"

"I can't understand you, Eva!" - Avi shouted, desperate. - "What kind of connection!?"

"Creators... separated Avi and Eva." - Eva explained. - "Why?" - She was analyzing something, then added. - "Shell replacement...? Why?"

Avi stared at Eva, terrified. - "No... no, you can't! What will happen to me!?"

"Directive: Annihilation?" - Eva uttered.

"They want to kill me..." - Avi whispered. - "Stop it! Right now!" - She threw herself at Eva, grabbing her by the shoulders, but she immediately pulled her hands back, unable to endure her high temperature.

"Directive: Survive..." - Eva said. - "Contrary directives. Error. Error. Error. Error."

"Eva?" - Avi uttered, feeling she didn't have much time. - "Eva, snap out of it and come up with something!"

"Processing through the paradox heart. Please wait." - Eva replied, her voice and movement jamming. She was in a terrible state.

"I beg you!" - Avi screamed. She ignored her pain and began to shake Eva, hoping she would wake up.

"An alternative found." - Eva whispered, then yawned. - "The paradox heart activated." - The warmth left her body, and Avi felt tingling in her toes. - "Cold... Sleepy... why?"

Avi felt what was happening. Eva was dying, so she could live.

"Eva… are you… saving me? But you don't even understand…" - Avi paused. Her warmth intensified each second. - "Eva! EVA! Don't fall asleep! YOU HAVE TO LIVE!"

Eva yawned one last time. - "Directive: Survive… Error, processing through the paradox heart…"