

Last Star 78

Star XXXI ~ The Angel's Message ~ Part III

Luna led Charlotte and Avi down the curved stairs to a round hall with four statues and three gates of light between them.

“It's the chamber of the first philosophers.” - Luna informed. - “They're their eldest precursors, who were partially responsible for popularizing their system of beliefs. Their theological and historical treatises are the basis for understanding their inaugural processes and spiritual practices.”

Avi approached one of the statues. It resembled a woman with a horn. - “Lily, Aetherwalker.”

“Sounds familiar.” - Luna commented.

“Yes, I still remember. It was the name we had encountered back when we obtained the first astronaut's soul fragment.”

“It might be worth asking them about her.” - Luna pointed out.

Avi kept reading. - “Arath – the cursed one. Aileen – the fragments' collector. Xan – soul weaver.”

“To us, these titles are pretty meaningless.” - Luna commented.

The middle door opened, and a monk walked out. - "Greetings. Luna and her companions, I assume? Please, come in."

The girls followed, passing through the barrier of light. The room was shaped like a glass dome concealed in tree roots, some even pierced the glass and floor, and concavities in their bark were used to hold books. The floor was decorated with a symbol of half-moon and half-sun, and four sitting pillows rested on it.

The monk sat down on the south side of the room, his back facing the window beyond which Belsaari was visible. Luna sat down on the north, facing him directly, while Charlotte and Avi occupied the leftover spots.

The monk was silent for a moment, praying, so Avi and Charlotte joined. Luna ignored it, but still patiently waited until everyone was done.

Once the prayers were completed, the monk spoke. - "You, who search for answers, why did you come here?"

"I'm going to die." - Luna answered. - "Anaari hijacked my body, it's no longer in my full control."

"Death hasn't to be the end." - The monk replied. - "I'm glad you trusted us enough to come."

"I'm not looking for enlightenment..." - Luna stated. - "...and I'm not interested in coping mechanisms."

"Then, what are you searching for? A way to prevent the inevitable?" - The monk asked.

"To be honest, I'm not looking for anything. The person dearest to me, Avi, persuaded me to talk with you." - Luna explained.

"Is she the one your heart has chosen?" - The monk asked.

"Yes." - Luna confirmed.

"Love is a beautiful miracle, capable of surviving even death. Blessed are those who can experience it in this life." - The monk declared. - "Avi, your partner isn't seeking anything here, so why did you bring her here?"

"I...?" - Avi felt embarrassed. - "Because... she... I think she is having issues with her spirituality."

"Luna, my heart would be overjoyed if you at least wanted to listen to what we have to say, but if your will is to live according to your own beliefs, we will respect it." - The monk stated.

"I can listen a bit..." - Luna replied. - "...but don't think you can change my mind."

"The starlight that always keeps us company, may it show the path to the truthseekers." - The monk said. - "Luna, can I ask you, what do you believe in?"

"I don't know. There is a lot I don't know. I want to believe in what I see, because belief itself is unreliable. At first, I thought that death was absolute, but I was proven otherwise." - Luna answered. - "If you show me that there truly is a different path, I'm ready to follow it, but mere words are not enough to convince me."

"We don't have anything to offer here, but words..." - The monk pointed out. - "...but the truth comes to many, even to those who aren't looking for it. In the form of love, in the form of good deeds, in the form of regret, in the form of courage, in the form of hope, and the form of reason. The last one is worth following, but it's not the only path that leads us to understanding."

"Avi already told me something similar." - Luna replied. - "I might even partially agree. Though it doesn't change my opinion about your claims about the soul's nature in relation to aether and nether. I find them hard to accept."

"Ahh, I see. You've doubts regarding our interpretation of Aetherwalker's texts." - The monk noted.

Avi interjected. - "Well... can you explain why you think that it's just for impure souls to be brought to further ruin?"

"Shouldn't those who don't want to repent be punished?" - The monk asked.

"They should..." - Avi uttered. - "...but completely abandoning them in ever-deepening darkness, won't help them."

“We don't know that. That's also the reason we are carrying out our mission. So, that during our lives, we can save every lost soul...” - The monk replied. - “...we firmly believe that every soul, in every moment, can be brought to salvation. If no person is capable of rejecting the truth for eternity, then the Nether can prove to be empty.”

“I understand that you're speaking only about souls, but you're risking forming an analogy that contradicts the law of aether's and nether's balance...” - Luna stated. - “...so it's hard to believe.”

Before the monk could respond, Avi added. - “What about the nether-born souls? Shouldn't they solve this issue?”

“Indeed, they do. Their existence solves mathematical models, but our faith hasn't much to do with them.” - The monk spoke. - “The balance might be unnecessary, but if it's necessary, then it can exist in a way that goes beyond our understanding.”

“Too much guessing, I still prefer math.” - Luna replied.

“If you want access to Lily's treatises, I can grant it...” - The monk offered. - “...but their truth relies on one's interpretation, and understanding it thoroughly requires grasping the essence of our faith and its laws.”

Luna raised her eyebrow. - “I think I will just start with her treatises.”

The monk began pressing buttons in his augmented reality interface, unlocking the data for Luna.

Luna's jaw slightly dropped. - "She was a genius. Her calculations agree with all my measurements and Anaari's knowledge... but they're so much more."

The monk remained silent. He waited for Luna's independent conclusions.

"Avi... I have no idea what the higher layers inscribed in aether are, but Lily developed a method to safely travel to locally bounded pocket dimensions at the end of time, and even return..." - Luna explained.

"You mean, like what had happened back on the Pioneer?" - Avi asked.

"Precisely, but we had a lot of luck. However, with this knowledge, we won't need it anymore!" - Luna declared.

The monk was missing context. - "Are you trying to say that you were aetherwalking?"

"Not really. The planes of existence that you speak of are beyond our physical grasp, but... how can I describe it... It's possible to enter isolated bubbles with an established, finite boundary." - Luna stated.

The monk was speechless. - "Only the blessed ones are allowed to visit those places. I must educate you. You've committed a serious transgression, but if you were unaware, it won't weigh down your soul. Please, refrain from doing this again."

"Please, don't be offended, but your interpretation of Lily's calculations is pure ignorance." - Luna said. -
"These pocket dimensions are nothing but a result of the fundamental forces."

The narrative has been illicitly obtained; should you discover it on Amazon, report the violation.

"You're interpreting the knowledge without taking spiritual dangers into account." - The monk spoke. -
"That's why you're wrong. The supplementary treatises describe the risks related to the soul's distortion that occurs during forceful passage."

"That research? I wouldn't even call it properly empirical... It's probably some kind of copy or imitation of other, original Lily's texts." - Luna guessed.

"Indeed, they are not part of the canonical research of Aetherwalker, but we are not allowed to share other works with the uninitiated." - The monk confirmed.

"Pity. This knowledge is wasted on you." - Luna said.

The monk sighed. - "I don't know how I'm supposed to warn you. The knowledge tends to be a blessing, but only if used correctly. There's so much evil in this world that stems from its irresponsible use. Please, consider the purpose of our conversation and channel your efforts toward following the path of the light."

Avi interjected once more. - "Luna... we should at least think about his request. We don't know if we're missing something."

"I don't think we are." - Luna denied. - "Most of their texts are pseudo-scientific frameworks loosely based on rigorous research. True pearls lie before them, yet they lack the discipline of logic and sufficient knowledge to properly process them and use them to create and prove new hypotheses."

"I'll admit, only a few of us are left, and the saints like Lily or Xan are long gone..." - The monk replied. - "...but the texts which you are reading are still results of many cycles of deliberations of great minds. Their interpretations, though not always easy to accept and contemplate, were approved by the final conclave at the end of the age of stars. They're years of heavy and difficult work."

"Wasted efforts." - Luna waved her hand dismissively.

"Luna!" - Avi scolded her. - "Please, show some respect to people who are trying to help us!" - Then she spoke to the monk. - "I'm sorry for my friend. I'll be glad to study them in my free time."

The monk pondered. He looked at Luna, then at Avi. - "I'm very glad about your eagerness, though for biological beings I suggest more accessible literature, namely canons on the journey of souls by the hand of Master Torion."

"I'll take them!" - Avi exclaimed. - "Please, send them to Luna, and she'll share them with me later."

Luna rolled her eyes.

The monk did as Avi requested. - "Although our shared reflections have somehow strayed from the original course of the conversation, I will pray that the knowledge you have gained brings you closer to the truth. Luna, if you want, we can still continue to explore your spirituality, but if you have different questions, I'm ready to answer them."

"Exploration of my spirituality can wait." - Luna stated boldly. - "I'm wondering about one thing... how did Aetherwalker extrapolate her data? If these texts were created before the age of stars, there are three possibilities – First, she could simulate the death of the universe, which would require unbelievably powerful technological backing. Second, she could live at the beginning of the universe and study Aether wells, then deduce the results by forming a reverse analogy. Third, she could live at the end of the universe... what would mean that her knowledge comes from the infinite universe that collapsed due to Immortals."

The monk couldn't easily respond to that. - "You're an insightful person."

"I think that the first option is unfeasible, if the knowledge comes from before the age of stars..." - Luna pondered. - "...and her name, Aetherwalker, implies she wouldn't do that in the age of birth."

"Indeed, you're speaking with reason..." - The monk said. - "...but my lips stay sealed."

"Ehh." - Luna leaned back, resting her hands on the floor and staring at the ceiling. - "More questions than answers, and you're keeping all the knowledge to yourself." - Luna continued. - "The knowledge that could put our understanding of the universe light-years ahead."

"As I mentioned, only in the right hands." - The monk calmly said.

"You have to choose between Anaari and Astronauts." - Luna uttered. - "I guess, you don't trust any of them?"

"We tried to reach their hearts, but they rejected the purification." - The monk replied. - "Even if death is only a temporary state, they still can't accept it."

"Why do you believe that death is necessary?" - Luna asked, slightly irritated.

The monk spoke. - "Death is necessary for life and change to exist. The death of stars is what made the existence of planets possible, and with them, the existence of various civilizations. Death is part of the evolution that made sapient life possible. In every moment, our present self ceases to exist, replacing what was flawed and damaged, so we can grow experienced and wise. By the death of the past, we have now, and why the death of now, we have the future."

"I see two kinds of death here, transitional and permanent." - Luna pointed out. - "I can agree with the first, but not the second."

The monk shook his head. - "Every death is transitional."

"Our definitions must be different. To me, permanent death is the one where our identity ceases to exist." - Lyna stated.

"Didn't you consider that we could be part of something greater than us?" - The monk asked.

"I don't accept those kinds of explanations. If our memory, personality, and even the very sense of self were supposed to disappear, then that's what an absolute death to me." - Luna replied.

"I understand your fears..." - The monk spoke. - "...we don't know what will be saved, and what will be lost during the process of passing to another plane of existence. It is still a great and unexplainable mystery. Yet, we must accept our place in the universe. A soul of every being will be judged one day, to fuel the Aether or Nether oceans."

Luna protested. - "It doesn't have to be like this! It's just your belief, and science is making progress. There already are immortal entities, so why can't we make it ultimately possible for everyone?"

"It's a path to stagnation." - The monk replied.

"No! Only finite is susceptible to stagnation, and our minds can develop beyond what we perceive as possible." - Luna argued. - "Your faith is obsolete. Why do you think that we'll always be limited to simple images and words, when we already touched the infinite?"

"The true infiniteness that you look for is the source that gave birth to our souls. How do you plan to return there while being bound by flesh? Only by death can we go back home." - The monk stated.

"Source? What kind of source are you speaking of?" - Luna asked. - "Even if it existed, it still doesn't mean we can't evolve and keep our bodies at the same time. You have no proof for that!"

The monk pondered for a moment. - "Only an entity that is the source, or acts in the source, could do that. The source is the ultimate boundary of understanding, the absolute truth, the infinite love, and the unwavering faith."

Luna interpreted it differently. - "Is it some kind of psyche singularity? Why would it be what's responsible for crossing the boundary of understanding?"

"Because it IS the understanding." - The monk explained. - "It's what gave you life and your reason."

"No, the only true understanding is science. What you're preaching is merely a jumble of baseless philosophies attempting to make sense of the world." - Luna countered.

"If the science is understanding, is it also what gave birth to you?" - The monk asked.

"In some sense, yes. I was created by Anaari." - Luna was adamant.

"They weren't the ones to give you soul, and no living being in this universe did that. Your science can explain the understanding, but it's not what fully makes it." - The monk stated.

Luna was clearly tired. - "Give me a proof for the existence of this 'source'."

“You're the proof. The proof is everywhere around you.” - The monk replied. - “If you require scientific proof, you won't find one, because understanding goes beyond science. That's the crux of spirituality that you seek.”

“That's the crux of pulling the wool over someone's eyes.” - Luna replied. - “Why would your truth be the only valid one? Why would your understanding be the final one? There can be as many 'sources' as there can be people.”

The monk closed their eyes. - “There is only one source. It's a necessary truth. From the very beginning, it guided our lives, revealing itself even to those who rejected its existence. The truth in your scientific formulas operates identically everywhere. The love you have for your closest ones is identical for all beings. Faith, that is understanding, is similar.”

“Nuh-uh.” - Luna shook her head. - “And what? Are you going to tell me that our faith should be evolving like love and science? That if I didn't get to know the truth, then I'm not ready?”

“I'm not the one who should judge whether you're ready or not.” - The monk spoke.

“Counter-theory. Your faith is empty” - Luna attacked. - “There is no source.”

Avi's expression became sadder, and she uttered quietly. - “...then what would our love, and everything that goes beyond understanding, come from?”

“Do you believe them? Do you believe everything they say!?” - Luna was shocked.

Avi became embarrassed. She wasn't certain. - "I... I'm reflecting on it. What they say is reasonable. I feel that there's more to life than what I've experienced this far."

"Eh." - Luna sighed. - "Let me explain my counter-theory. I believe that there is something absolute, analogous to the source, to love, and to truth... I just removed 'faith' from the equation. That way, I've created 'source' other than theirs, which still explains the world the way it is, only through the scientific truth... and it was just an example."

Avi disagreed. - "Then why won't you remove 'love' from the equation? Maybe it's also only science!? Oh, no, you won't do that, because we were already discussing it, and you 'believe' in it. That's exactly the 'faith' you want to remove."

Luna bit her lip. She felt she would have to take her word back.

The monk interrupted. - "The love can be realized through truth and faith. Faith, through science and love. Truth, through love and faith. These three concepts are tightly interconnected and inseparable."

"Alright, have it your way. Maybe I have some sort of 'faith'..." - Luna continued. - "...but it still doesn't guarantee that the unequivocal source exists. My faith can be simply a result of psyche-related conditioning, without any singularity that gave birth to it."

"Doubts are part of us." - The monk spoke. - "Without them, the faith would be blind. It's important to approach everything with rationality and love. It's hard for me to point out a clear path for dealing with doubts, but to discover the truth anew, I recommend the text of master Evgira."

Luna decided she was too exhausted by now. - “Eh, send them... I'll study them in my spare time.”

Avi smiled at Luna, assuming she was more open to seeing the world the way she sees it.

Luna noticed, so she wanted to gently correct her mistake. - “These questions will never end, but you have books for everything, right?”

The monk didn't notice her intentions. - “No, not for everything. The faith is a continuous exercise in growth, prayer, and contemplation.”

“I get it, I get it! I'll 'exercise' to discover 'my path'. - Luna said reluctantly. - “My 'spirituality' is totally 'safe'.”

“May the stars' light listen to your prayers.” - The monk blessed them.

“And yours.” - Avi added.

The meeting was over after these short words. Luna experienced a slight cognitive dissonance upon once again hearing a saying of her people from foreign lips. What did it have to do with her and everything she believed in?