

# A Star's Way through the Universe

## I. Prelude

Suddenly the lights turned on. I found myself on a red couch, in what seemed to be a lobby, sort-of. It was decorated in a peculiar way, like the inside of a locomotive. My first instinct was to get up and look around, I didn't remember anything from before, how I got here or even who I really were. Going around the room I discovered some expensive looking ornaments, doors on both sides of the lobby, like a corridor and windows, dark albeit illuminated by stars. But it didn't feel like night. There were cheerful noises from the room next to the lobby, I thought. I approached the window. Outside was nothing. Empty space as far as the human eye can see. Not quite empty though, filled with stars is more appropriate. Still, I was in space. Travelling in a direction, even. I wasn't sure which way; I was still way too tired to think properly. Just as I was about to turn around to open the door, to see if anyone could help me out, the door on my right opened.

A tiny, fluffy... being came through, equipped with a train conductors' hat and a tablet with coffee and sweets. The creature put it onto a table that was next to the couch I slept on, then directed its view at me. Awkward silence. It seemed to have a face, maybe I could talk to it? I opened my mouth, but the thing was faster. "Stop. I know exactly what you're going to say now. Just... listen first, okay? The others are coming in a second. Just stay here." It went out the other door, where the noises came from. The door shutting was followed by a loud high-pitched scream. I managed to decipher the word "Pom-Pom" before the door opened once again and 4 odd-looking people came in. Actually, I take that back, their outfits were pretty cute actually.

One was very tall, serious expression, not much to him. The one I assume the scream must have come from was rather short, was coloured like the trans-flag and looked at me with a big smile, which I didn't really understand. The third one was also tall, not as tall as the first one though, just regular masculine tall, I guess. His looks were also on me but in a more analytical way.

I looked at the last one, standing a bit behind the others. I could make out grey hair, and a stylish jacket but I didn't get a view of the person right away.

The big smiley girl started talking to me, while the little creature prepared coffee it seemed.

"Ookay! Let me introduce myself, I'm March 7<sup>th</sup>, the coolest crew member on the Astral Express! This is Dan Heng", pointing at the third described person,

"... HEY Dan Heng don't be rude, introduce yourself!"

As if woken up from a coma he stared first at me, then at March, then back at me.

“I’m sorry, I was lost in my thoughts. Anyway, I’m Dan Heng, also on the Astral Express, my job is the analysis of all the things that are going on.”

The very tall man approached me directly. I took a few steps back, but then he just offered me a handshake.

“Mr. Yang. It’s my pleasure.”

As he moved out of the way I could now get a glance at the fourth person- a girl that was leaning on the wall, expressionless, but somehow, I couldn’t help but stare at her for a few moments.

“Ah yes. This is Stelle,” March said, “our newest member here on the Astral Express. We just recently found her during one of our missions!”

She waved at me, with a slight smile. I think I blushed a little.

Finally, I got the chance to speak.

“I- “

I got immediately interrupted by the small thing that was pouring cups of coffee: “Everyone sit down, it’s cookie time.”

“What’s that thing?” I uttered.

“THING? THAT’S POM-POM!” March shouted at me.

“March...” Dan Heng sighed with a judgemental look at March.

“You must be very confused”, he continued, “let’s just have a few cookies and talk meanwhile. The ‘Thing’ you were referring to is the conductor of the Astral Express. Their name is Pom-Pom, please don’t be rude to them.”

Pom-Pom wanted to say something, but swallowed it down.

“Will anyone of you now tell me how I even got here? Or who I am for that matter?”

## II. The Star Rail

I had a rather long conversation with the Members of the Astral Express. As far as I understand they travel to defeat evil star beings, or something- To be completely honest I was too stunned by Stelle to think correctly. I caught myself looking over to her way too many times during ‘cookie time’. Pom-Pom seems to be actually kind of nice.

I also met Himeko, she joined us shortly after cookie time began.

The hierarchy of power seems to be, except for the clear distinction between adults and march, non-existent. Roles are pretty clearly distributed though; Dan Heng, as

mentioned, is responsible for analysing data; March for keeping the mood upright and Stelle... I don't know. She's pretty new on here, hasn't had much experience and I don't think they told me more. So, we kind of share a similar fate here. And surprisingly March does too, she was rescued by the Astral Express as well, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, hence her name. Speaking of, I don't know my name either. But I don't know the date, so that naming scheme is out of the realm of possibilities. I don't remember anything from my life, so choosing a name on any basis is quite challenging.

March 7<sup>th</sup> was touring me through the Astral Express, showing me everyone's rooms. With everyone I just mean Dan Heng and Stelle, the others are reasonable with their privacy policies. Dan Heng's Room was full of technical stuff, although it seemed cozy in its own way. Stelle's room contained barely anything but a bed and some basic furniture. Notable was only the messy desk with a lot of scribbles and drawings on it. March 7<sup>th</sup>'s Room was... different to say the least.

March said I would be sleeping in Stelle's room for the time being as they figure out more about my backstory.

But then she asked the question. "What's your name? How should I call you?" It wasn't that big of a deal, still I was kind of paralysed for a second. I had to think of something. It came rushing through my mind like a lightning, as if the name wanted to tell me something, but I had to unlock that memory first. "Luma!" I almost shouted as if it was the answer to a quiz question, that I only had one second left on.

March looked at me confused, then busted out laughing.

"What's so funny??"

March looked up from her belly which she laughed in, grinned at me, holding in another burst of laughter and started again.

"Nothing personal Luma", she gasped for air, "I just... like the way you introduced yourself. Glad to have you here!"

She gave me a little hug and brought me back to Stelle's room.

"It was a long day, you should rest now, I'm sure Stelle will also go to sleep soon"

She closed the door behind me.

There was a second bed now placed next to Stelle's, a small table in-between. The room was now symmetrical looking from the door, just that my drop-in furniture was a little smaller. On my desk I found a note, reading:

"I hope you're not having a too hard time with March"

"- Dan Heng"

Well, at least she is not in her room 24/7.

Stelle was on her Desk, on the opposite site of the room, writing a few things in what seemed to be a diary or journal. I thought she would be distracted enough doing that, so I quickly undressed myself to get into the comfortable clothes Dan Heng

supposedly has prepared for me on the bed. Only after I stuck my head through the pyjamas top, I realized that Stelle was watching me, very interested. She didn't even mind that she was caught watching me, looked me in the eyes a split second, smiled and turned back to her journal.

It's not like that's a problem or anything, we're both girls after all. I laid down inside the bed, illuminated only by the shine of the desk lamp that Stelle kept on to finish writing. A few minutes later she joined me in the bed next to me.

We both laid face-up, staring at the ceiling, trying to remember our forgotten pasts. I faded out a little, rethinking back to the conversation we had earlier this morning. I began to hear their voices. A penetrating "Hey" could be heard echoing in my thoughts. But it wasn't a voice I knew. I almost rolled out of bed, snapping me back to reality. It was her voice. I only now realise I haven't heard it before. It was quite deep, but very soft and comforting, unlike described by March, Stelle didn't feel like the type to smash a baseball bat into alien faces.

I forgot I was thinking again. This must've been a weird 10 seconds, because Stelle was looking at me dead-worried I died of an anaphylactic shock from sudden voice exposition.

I promptly answered in a similar manner I did tell my name to March earlier, stuttering, because I was overtaken with the situation.

"I don't know your name yet" said Stelle, keeping her warm slight smile.

"Luma. My name's Luma" I say, with a bit more confidence.

Silence again. Both of our conversational skills seemed to have no effect on continuing beyond basic questions. Still, she seemed to be happy about that little bit of information.

"Good night, Luma", she said.

"Good night, Stelle"

### III. Journey

I woke up to the sound of knocking on my door. It was Pom-Pom, going around as morning patrol, making sure everyone is ready for the next day. Speaking of which, I didn't know what they were doing here all day. Thinking about it, living in a train that drives through space is a rather boring activity on its own. At least I have company, I thought.

"GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE"

March's voice was very clearly heard by the whole Express. First an annoyed sigh, then a breath of relief came out of Stelle's mouth. She looked at me, nodded over to the door and we got up. We went into the adjacent bathroom, I got out the stuff that

was labelled with “The new one” and brushed my teeth. I was finished dressing before Stelle so I watched her this time. At least that was the plan, until she looked over to me and I couldn’t look up from embarrassment. We all met in the lobby at 9:30 am, whatever time means here. Breakfast was served by Pom-Pom, I thanked them extensively because I could still sense a note of distrust in their acting when near me. To be fair, I have called them a thing a lot. “How was your first night, new one?” Dan Heng asked like it was a routine.

“Good, I guess”

“Her name is Luma, L-U-M-A dummy” March breached in.

“How should I know that? Yesterday she was nameless”

“Well... you could...”

March had clearly not had the most thoughtful awakening this morning. Himeko chuckled.

“Ok Luma, let me show you how we will ‘spend our time’ here together. In 24 minutes, Pom-Pom will initiate top-speed with the Astral Express. As you know, we travel around the universe, eradicating certain ‘entities’ in our way. You got that much yesterday, right?”

I vaguely remember that yes. Though, what such an entity is, was still unclear to me.

“We have found another one of those. We call them Stellarons. They’re sort of like stones on a railroad, we can’t really get past one if it is in our way. We have to do something about them. Since you have no combat experience whatsoever, our wonderful Welt here will teach you some basics, while our dream-team March 7<sup>th</sup>, Dan Heng and Stelle go and deal with the more serious matters.”

With Welt she meant Mr. Yang, I suppose. We continued to eat. I just listened to the others talk, I had nothing of value to contribute. Stelle gave the impression her situation was the same. She just sat there, enjoying a croissant with way too much chocolate on. A bit after the dishes were carried away March started posing in the middle of the room.

“She’s always doing this”, Dan Heng leans over to me.

“She’s trying to keep her balance during the warp. This has never worked so far.”

Stelle positioned herself next to March, having a little fun with her.

Pom-Pom’s voice emanated through a speaker. We made ourselves ready for the warp. I just followed whatever Dan Heng was doing, he was definitely the most trustworthy of the bunch.

A flashing light, a lot of turbulence and a falling March later, the Express came to a halt. Stelle managed to stand still, thus beat March to the first time standing during the warp. Nothing less to expect from a woman who beats cosmic threats with a baseball bat.

While the others departed, I went with Mr. Yang. He explained to me how combat worked here, a curious system where you devote yourself to a path of an Aeon, a sort of higher being. It was very fun actually, Mr. Yang was a very good teacher. After about 4 hours we were finished, I was really exhausted and needed to go take a break in the lobby. Mr. Yang handed me a phone and the contact data of the crew, so I would stay in touch.

It seems I'm now part of the Astral Express. Are they not trying to get me back to where they found me? I still don't know more about where exactly I'm from, they have omitted a lot of details. Maybe they don't know much themselves, it was Stelle who found me on a mission, that's all they told me.

Anyway, I started informing myself more and more about my situation. I spent a few hours talking to Herta over the phone, lead scientific researcher. I have somehow had another imagination of the laws of physics in my head, I don't really remember anything but the intuition was different. I also talked a bit with Asta, who seems to be a really nice captain of another crew. She was involved when they discovered Stelle, apparently her ship got attacked by the 'Void Rangers'.

All-in-all my afternoon went really smoothly. In the evening the three came back on board of the Astral Express. March couldn't stop complaining about the natives on the planet calling her 'weird', while Dan Heng and Stelle were more on the side of those natives.

This evening we spent playing boardgames, mostly luck-based, while the three – mostly March – energetically told me about their endeavours previously. He evening had a really nice feeling to it. Being under people like that felt oddly heart-warming.

#### IV. Destiny

We were lying in bed, once again. Every now and then Stelle talked to me, a little more each night we spent together. I felt special knowing not even the others get to hear her voice as often as I do, just because I sleep in her room. Well, our room, because today it was announced I was officially accepted as member of the crew. That made me really happy, although I didn't know what else to expect. They could've not just ejected me into space or anything. However, I still do wonder what the meaning of all this is. Why are we doing all this and how did this even begin? Why do only stranded people seem to land on here?

I audibly sighed over all this and gained the attention of Stelle on the other side of the gap between our beds.

“What's wrong, Luma? Is something bothering you?”

“I just thought a lot about these past days.”

How was it for you to arrive here? Did you not have any second thoughts?”

“Not really... I just accepted it as destiny, since I didn’t know where else to go. I didn’t need a reason to trust anyone here, they rescued me and have given me a safe space to be. Are you doubting yourself?”

“Yes, a lot. You all seem so much better at everything you do. I mean, even you. I admire you for having that mindset.”

She does her signature soft smile again, but it seems more sincere this time.

“Sorry” I said.

She got up. All she was wearing was her underwear, contouring her beautiful muscular body.

She got over to my side and positioned herself on top of me, on all fours, before sinking down and giving me a kiss on the forehead. I was paralysed, my heart was racing and my body was flooded with a really nice feeling of warmth and closeness.

“Don’t apologize for who you are, Luma”

Her speaking my name in that soft tone made me tear up a little. I would be so lost without her.

Without a word I pulled her closer and put the blanket on top of us both. Our legs intertwined and I cried myself out, quietly on her left shoulder. A few minutes pass and she kissed me right on the lips. I was very surprised; it felt very weird but so good, I wish this would never end. And it didn’t, I fell asleep that night, tightly in Stelle’s arms, as she comforted me. Coming from someone that went through almost the same things as myself, that was really relieving. Also, no matter if I had a life before this one, that kiss was the best thing to ever happen to me regardless. I knew I liked her from the start but I couldn’t pinpoint whether I want to be like her or just love her. It was both.

“I love you” I whisper, as my eyes close and I fall asleep.

## V. Departure

March caught us cuddling while storming through the door this morning to let everyone know that she successfully folded a paper bird.

Stelle has not let go of my hand, being the Stelle how she always is around the others; beautiful and expressionless except for her precious smile, that will always remind me of the day that I first met my love.

