

Alwynn Lin, Renowned Heir to Andromeda Corporations- Missing?!

Bright, blue headlines glare at me from the HoloNews, further intensifying the dull ache in my eyes; the surreal feeling intensifies, like I'm floating aimlessly. Honestly, I never thought my desertion would lead to hunkering away in a cramped, scrappy ship with a dysfunctional heating system, surrounded by rebels.

"Couldn't sleep?" A voice asks from the doorway, the flickering shadows concealing their features almost entirely.

"No," I scoffed sarcastically, "I just didn't want to miss the desolate, dark, scenery." I gestured to the window, the endless haze of darkness with feeble flashes of stars saying everything for me.

Silence stretches on, and she tips her head, analyzing me with a critical eye and sardonic smirk.

"It wouldn't hurt to be a little more grateful," she replies dryly. "We get it. You're Alwynn Lin, godly and talented; always too good for the rest of us mere peasants."

Rolling her eyes, she strides over, so close that I can tell it's Clover, the ship captain. Her words were sarcastic, but the bitterness behind them burns with genuinity.

I *almost* feel bad.

Yet, I wasn't forced to learn how to wrap my own knuckles as a 6 year old, who couldn't understand the weight of the training blaster in her hand, or have to cut off friends, because studying and working always came first, to be belittled like this. Nonetheless, Clover raises a hand, cutting me off before I respond.

Looking me in the eyes, she says, "You don't get that privilege here. You're stuck with all of us, and you should be thankful we even rescued you."

"Oh, do be quiet," I shoot back. "I deserted Andromeda after I found out about the corruption. I would've thought rebels like you could understand, but you're clearly too caught up in your own assumptions."

Petty satisfaction arises as I see her face go through a wide span of expressions: eyes widening in alarm before narrowing in suspicion. I knew it sounded fake; even before I was born, my legacy had already been decided. Being the only child of the founders of one of the biggest corporations, what other fate could I have, if not following in my parents' footsteps?

"*You* don't know everything, and the fact that your ship is still intact is proof enough." I press on, purposely giving my voice a grating edge.

From her stance, minutely softening as she pinned me with a probing gaze, I began to wonder how much Clover really knew. Did she know how draining it is, never knowing who I am- always living through the expectations of others? Did she realize, when I watched my communication devices get crushed to pieces, my last link to Andromeda, it felt like the first breath of freedom?

“Well, like it or not, you’re stuck here, and we *all* contribute our part.” Despite the harsh tone of her voice, she slowly, deliberately turned back to the entrance and left, a tentative offering of fragile peace.

We, the captain had said, as if I was one of them.

They all had someone to wait for them, someone to grasp their hands and help them up, strong with the confidence that as long as they were together- nothing would be in their way; they were a family. The closest thing I had was the fleet I commanded, yet there was always a lingering distance in the empty mess halls and stretched silence. I fought, trained, and executed missions alone- anything else was a weakness, a distraction for the mighty Alwynn Lin.

‘Alwynn Lin’, representing the success and the expectations that followed- everyone watching, waiting for you to fall. Yet, as I listen to everything that surrounds me: roaring laughs around a table too small for all of them, inside jokes that were hidden in the crinkle of an eye, playful bickering over a worn deck of cards, I start to realize life is so much

more colorful and vibrant than the alabaster white and gray walls of the cold and isolating ship I grew up in.

When I wake up, it's to the jolt of the ship, slamming me into a corner. I rush outside but everyone has already gathered around the control panel, expressions of stony worry etched in all their faces. My appearance seems to finally break them out of their stupor. Adalyn, one of the pilots, grabs the gun holstered to her belt and storms over to me. The sound of a loaded weapon rings in the silent space, and the entire room becomes a baited breath.

“You! Did you lead them to us?” She accuses, pointing at the radar, where a huge ship was rapidly making its way towards us.

I freeze as I see the transmission signal, I could recognize it anywhere- the signal of Andromeda.

“No! Why would I doom myself like that? Besides, I was in the storage rooms all night, and your ship is too shoddy to attempt anything.” I shoot back, trying to calm my fraying nerves.

“Blaming Alwynn won't stop the predicament we're in.” Across the room, furiously typing something, Clover hisses. “We're too far away for back-up, the quickest time the Nova Squadron can get here is in a few hours.”

No one is surprised, but their eyes harden, the looks of soldiers marching off to a battle they might not return from.

“You’re outnumbered and outgunned, plus they’re most likely here for me. I’ll tell them that I forced you to take me and that I was planning on betraying Andromeda as well. They won’t go easy on you, but use the distraction to escape.” I suggest, but my mind was made up a long time ago. These people, no matter what, don’t deserve to get caught in the crossfire, and I was bound to face Andromeda sooner or later. Traitor or not, I still once commanded one of the largest fleets, and I was gambling on the fact that it would be enough for me to leak all the files and evidence I gathered as a final act of rebellion.

“Stop,” Clover suddenly called out, her voice strained and gritted, “let me go with you. Pretend to take me as a prisoner to let down their guard, and set off a smoke bomb. It won’t hurt them, but it’ll give us just enough time to escape. Just make sure you land near an exit.”

“I don’t need your help.” My heart beats furiously, and I’m a child again, helplessly dusting myself off and struggling to get up while my parents watch from the sidelines.

*Get up, you’re not **weak**. You need to represent us well, to be strong-*

“It’ll give us a better chance to get away if they’re caught off guard. Don’t think I’m doing this for you.” Clover snarkily adds, looking back.

Not having a response, I quieted, wondering when the insults spitten with venom, turned into an almost familiar bantering.

Andromeda expected our appearance, never firing, and seamlessly opening their gate for when we arrived.

“Ms. Lin, you don’t know how good it is to see you. Everyone was worried about your sudden disappearance... Oh! Who is this?”

Admiral Antares, a senior officer, greeted me, his bland, polite smile and gentle tone concealing his true intentions.

“This is the leader of a rebellion I found scavenging for scraps in the slums. They match your investigation requirements.” I replied, pasting on a casual smirk as I pushed Clover forward.

The admiral’s eyes narrowed as he observed the situation, clearly suspicious.

“Very well then, thank you. We have a lot to discuss now that you’ve returned... if we may?” He trailed off, making it obvious I couldn’t refuse.

Before I could reply, the signal in my pocket buzzed, and from the way Clover shifted, I knew she got the sign too.

“Of course, I’ll be right back, I just need to find something from my speeder for the prisoner.” It was the flimsiest excuse I could’ve made, but the admiral didn’t have the will or courage to contradict me as I backed away.

In the end, I saw it before anything; the wave of a sleeve, and cloudy, gray, gas, filling the entire room.

Chaos exploded, alarms shrieking as guards rushed in, weapons loaded.

“Stop them!” The admiral demands, but we’re already at our ship, and I begin the panicked attempt to unlock the port.

I wish I could say I zoned out, or sped through everything, but I was all too aware of every button I pressed, of every second that passed, and I curse my past self for all the complications. Eventually, the doors, once tightly locked, crept open, and we dash out, swerving and dropping.

I make a prayer to all the gods I’ve never believed in when we manage to get outside, but it’s not over yet. Speeders and fighters start dashing their way towards us, and our crew is frighteningly far away.

“Can we make it?!” I yell, not knowing if Clover can hear me.

“Of course we can- I still have a trick up my sleeve!” Clover shouts back, and I don’t even have time to process her words before we shoot forward, backs pressed into our seats as we hurtle across space.

Everything is tumultuous, but the roar of engines is lessening, and we get so close to our ship port that I want to reach for it, grabbing it like a thirsty man does for water. The tumble in is even worse, the screech of metal against metal erupting with white-hot sparks.

With a lurch, our ship takes off, distant thuds ringing as we try to catch our breath. I instantly start thinking of the consequences- Andromeda isn’t the type to forgive, especially not for a betrayal as big as mine. It’ll be hell for me, Clover, and her crew too, because they can’t escape this mess. No place will be completely safe, not with the biggest corporation hunting us down, but the thrill of victory, getting away, *living* and surviving to fight another day, dulls any sense of emergency or pain.

It numbs the sting of any injuries, but my legs are shaking so hard, I stumble ungracefully, attempting to pull Clover out. Both of us take a moment to breathe, letting everything sink in.

When the crew comes to check on us, we’re a sorry sight: bloody and battered, burned and scraped all over, collapsed against the wall.

“You should be so thankful I got us out! Outpiloting Andromeda, that’ll make my resume look *so* good.” Adalyn preens jokingly, walking over and grinning as she helps Clover up.

The rest of them follow her, all lending a hand, much to Clover’s faux exasperation. I watch as they hobble forward, pressed to each other’s sides, fitting together like puzzle pieces. For a moment, I think about following them, but I’m too worn out, and I don’t think my presence would be welcome, even with the stunt we pulled today.

“Wait. Give me a second,” Clover calls, breaking free of their hold and walking over.

“...What are you waiting for?” Adalyn asks curiously, her gaze trailing over to me, only to look away, embarrassed flush tinting her cheeks.

Clover doesn’t respond until she reaches me, extending her hand. We’re both grimy and covered in debris and blood, but I take her hand still, letting myself get pulled up. We take in our frizzy hair, newly forming bruises, slumped posture, and we’re laughing, unrestrained and only a little shaky.

I’ve won so many battles, alone, but standing here, fighting alongside someone, is something different. The rest of the crew seems to understand, even Adalyn.

“You guys go on, I’ll just wait for Alwynn.”

Stumbling carelessly down the corridor, I realize, everyone here may be different and rough around the edges, but they’re always there for each other, and maybe, I have a chance of finding my place amongst this patchwork home.