Recovery

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Recovery

by [echo_grace](#)

Summary

Alan has won the battle and gotten his son back . . . but how do they win the war?

Notes

1. Yes, the first several paragraphs are a partial retread from Rescue so everyone can get back into the swing of things. It's a very intentional deja vu, but that doesn't mean you can/should just skip it. ;-)

2. Recovery has proven even more difficult to write than I'd anticipated, while Sam's story (now titled Renegade) is developing a Lord of the Rings level of epilogues and/or a fourth sequel. Which has gotten me thinking: if I post what I have of Recovery (the Prologue and first two chapters), then leave it open as a question/prompt fill and jump into Renegade, will people follow along and provide said questions/prompts? Or would it just confuse everyone too much?

I don't want to back out of my promise to post, but I also don't wanna leave y'all hanging, either.

Prologue

"What's troubling you?" Alan's voice murmured into the silence.

"You didn't cleanse him," Tron finally said, shifting uneasily against his wall. "Why? I could see the corruption in his code –"

"Do to him what he did to you?" Alan asked. Tron's jaw clenched, and he bowed his head. "Couple reasons. One, because he doesn't want it right now. Forcing him to change when he's unable to choose will only create resentment and havoc on down the line, good intent be damned." He took off his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. "Two . . . is a little more complicated."

Tron nodded.

Alan tried to think it through, then sighed and just started talking. "I don't know what Clu's original programming was – what he was meant to *be* – and he was born with the virus already enmeshed in his systems. Even if I could destroy the virus without destroying him along with it, he probably wouldn't be viable without massive rewrites –"

"And you're still pissed with Flynn."

"Yeah," Alan nodded. "Nevermind the hypocrisy. It's all way too close to me right now. I'd probably inflict my anger with the father onto the son without realizing it. And the first person who'd *normally* notice and say anything against it wouldn't bother – you'd just see it as justice."

Tron thought about it, then nodded and leaned his head back, mirroring Alan. "So the fight continues."

Alan snorted. "You think it ever stopped?"

"Do Programs dream of electric sheep?" Tron countered.

"*Do* Programs dream?"

Tron shrugged. "Eh, sorta. If shut-down is equivalent to sleep . . . I might actually dream of sheep, now," he mused, his eyes drifting closed.

"'Cause you know what they are?"

"A sheep that's also Clu, chasing me through a city-jungle on Mars –"

"Wow, bedtime's really calling you," Alan said, slipping his glasses back on and shuffling up onto his feet.

"– You in a cheerleader outfit –"

"That's enough of that. C'mon." He offered Tron a hand up. Struggling to open his eyes again, Tron accepted the offer, only to slump against Alan's shoulder.

"He knew me," he muttered. "At the Portal. Rinzler couldn't understand why a child would want to come to him, but Sam was fighting so hard . . ." He pressed his forehead against Alan's neck. "Would he still like me now . . . that 'm not a hero –"

"Yes," Alan declared. "He's your biggest fan, after me."

Tron snickered, but didn't argue. Alan wrapped his arm around his son's waist in a half-hug, and they took a moment to just lean on each other –

Energy *zing*ed through the circuits lining the walls, and Alan opened eyes he hadn't realized he'd closed. "What's that?"

"Th' Encom System would do that a lot," Tron explained. "Doesn't really happen on the Grid unless Flynn –"

The entire building shuddered, cracks appearing and randomly fanning out of the walls and floor out of nowhere as a deep, threatening thrum resonated throughout the Grid. Alan choked on air and collapsed with a strangled sound, circuits sputtering as bits of . . . something flaked off him.

Baffled and frightened, Tron knelt and pulled his father close. Then a scream ripped out of Alan's throat that almost sent Tron straight into nightmare.

He knew that sound far too intimately.

Pieces of the hallway started to crumble, even as their circuits burned brighter. Connections flew through Tron's mind, and his grip tightened as Alan's whole body flickered, like how Programs would derezz on the Encom System. A rage like he'd never experienced before – not even when he faced down Clu just a few hours ago – rose in Tron, and he bellowed,

"FLYNN, *STOP!*"

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~ *

They were about halfway down the stairs when a surprised yelp and crash yanked them all the way down and into the office.

Quorra was scrambling back up onto her feet over by the bookshelves, staring at Daddy with wide eyes –

Daddy, who wasn't slumped over the desk anymore. Daddy, who was getting up from his toppled chair and rubbing at his hands as he glared at the computer. And cursed a blue streak.

"Sonuva-*fucking-bitch* –"

"Flynn?"

"Hey, Ra- Roy," Daddy said, distracted, "I'm kinda in the middle of something –"

"What did you do?" Sam accused, then turned to Quorra. "I thought you were watching him!"

"I was!"

"Have you been here this whole time? Where's Ala- –?"

Sparks flew as Daddy tried to do something on the computer. "God-*damnit*! Lemme back in, you *bastard* –"

"STOP HURTING HIM!" Sam screamed, and shoved Daddy away from the desk, making him topple onto the couch. "You're as bad as Clu! Uncle Alan saved us! He's gonna save Tron an' clean up your mess, and you're tryin' to kill him, you *MONSTER*! I HATE YOU!" With that, Sam tore away, racing upstairs and back to the bathroom in the loft, where he threw up between wracking sobs of grief and terror and exhaustion.

He had no idea of the devastated silence he left behind.

"What the *hell* is going on, Flynn?"

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Fallout.

Chapter 1

It was a struggle to wake up, in more ways than one. Nothing seemed to . . . *fit* quite right.

He also knew it would take a lot of energy . . . and only give more pain.

So instead he drifted in an ocean of nothingness for an endless time, the distant echoes of pain easily cancelled out by the gentle bobbing waves rocking him. He closed his eyes against a shimmer of green trying to capture his attention –

"Alan? Alan, please wake up," a voice called from far away, tugging at his chest. Awareness pricked at his senses. Who is that? *"I need you here . . . please come back."*

(He sounds scared.)

A jolt of memory washed over him. *Tron. Son.* And like riding the wave of a tsunami, Alan lurched from a barely-there existence back to full-bodied presence, pain howling through him the entire way.

Gem's face jerked back as he almost headbutted her.

"H%w%*^ e@#(i*?" he asked blearily.

Gem's brow wrinkled slightly, and she glanced at someone beside/above him.

Alan followed he gaze and sighed when he recognized Tron. "K#&@/*dfd (Ev* ;~) C%S^{," he muttered, falling into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

Waking up the second time was easier, the pain now a full-bodied ache like he was in the depths of the flu. His eyes opened to the dull, sheet metal gray of a ceiling with minimal lighting. A sense of pressure/presence along his right side, and his head lolled over to see . . .

Tron. Fast asleep and curled around his arm like it was a favorite stuffed animal.

He smiled to himself and sighed; debated if he really had the energy to be awake yet –

"You've been unconscious for almost four cycles," a voice murmured from the foot of their bed (when did they get to a bed?). With a great effort, he pulled his head back to center, seeking out the speaker. "Tron's refused to leave your side, not that anyone was arguing with him." A blur that looked like Ram stood up from his chair and moved to sit next to him on the bed. "Do you remember what happened?"

The memory came quickly, but it took a moment for Alan to find the words. His lips tore slightly as they parted; his sluggish tongue swiped out to ease the sting. "We were . . . in a hallway," he started, voice gravelly, "tryin' to get th' other to go to bed." Ram's mouth twitched, his shoulders relaxing as Alan continued. "Energy surged, th'n . . . somethin' started ripping me apart." His eyes drifted closed again. "Ev'ryone 'kay?"

Ram might've said yes, but Alan was already falling asleep again.

* * * * *

He woke a third time to thunder rumbling overhead. His head and chest still ached like a herd of elephants had stomped over him, but he felt a little more present; more functional, as he lifted his tree-trunk arms to lever himself up into a sitting position.

The room swished around him, his stomach trying to take a peek at the world outside. If his vertical state wasn't so tenuous, he would've made a grab for his head to make sure it didn't roll away somewhere. As it was, he could only puff out a little air, then take a slow, deep breath in, shoving his stomach back down closer to where it belonged. He pulled his legs in, propping his forehead against one knee and wrapping his arms around it, while the other splayed out to give him more area to balance on.

A flash of light made him jerk up, tense; another roll of thunder told him it was just a storm. He sighed and let his head fall again, breathing deep to calm his racing heart.

The room was empty, this time. Tron must've woken up earlier. Maybe he was working with Ram to figure out what happened . . . where to go from here. . . .

He might've drifted off again, sitting there, but eventually Alan lifted his head and looked around him.

The bed he'd been sleeping on was a large, firm square, barely big enough to keep his feet from dangling off the edge. Ram's chair (Windsor? Wingback? One of those dramatic leather-padded ones) sat a few feet from the foot, facing a fireplace lit with dancing blue flames.

Lightning flashed again, drawing his gaze to the giant window that made up the far-left corner. A large, low-slung white-leather couch partially blocked the view, but also reflected something shimmering on the other side. Alan swung his legs over the side of the bed; managed to lurch himself up onto his feet just long enough to catch a glimpse of what looked like a bathing pool full of energy, churning under the rain, before he crashed back down.

Dizziness attacked again, but Alan managed to fight it off a little quicker this time. *This must be Flynn's room*, he thought, staring at the black tile under his feet. It was barren of Flynn's usual vibrancy, but Flynn probably hadn't had the time, interest, or energy to put into making it more of a home than a temporary retreat while leading the fight.

After several minutes of rest, Alan scooted back on the bed and flipped his legs over the other side to get a different view.

And had to pause a third time to steady out again. But he found his glasses on the bedside table, next to a picture frame. He picked it up after putting his glasses on, and was doubly-surprised when a finger brushing the glass made the picture start to move like a film.

It was of Sam's last birthday – the moment he unwrapped his custom-made Tron and Clu toys. The "camera" jostled a little as Sam tackle-hugged the viewer with an excited squeal. Alan's thumb brushed along Sam's cheek as the boy looked up with adoration, pausing the video.

Will I ever see you again? he wondered for a long moment, then let it go.

A different picture popped up in its place: Alan's old office, about a year after ousting Dillinger. Alan's sitting on the wrong side of the desk with his ankles crossed on top of it, looking at a kernel of popcorn hovering in the air above him. Roy's in the command chair, messing around on Alan's computer. (Not an unusual occurrence, though it became rarer as Flynn climbed the corporate ladder and dragged Alan behind him.)

Curious what this memory could be, Alan tapped the screen.

The kernel lands in his mouth, and Alan crunches it with a satisfied sigh.

"Am I boring you, Alan?" Roy asks dryly.

The "camera" hesitates and hovers in the doorway as Alan catches a second kernel and huffs a laugh. "Hardly. Finding an excuse to get you up here's only the second-best part of my week." He pulls another small handful from the bowl in his lap and stuffs a few in his mouth.

Roy heaves an exaggerated sigh. "Should've known you'd only love me for my brain." Alan retaliates by throwing a popcorn kernel at him. Roy's typing doesn't even slow as he turns to catch it in his mouth. "How's the head?"

"Crisis mostly averted," Alan smacks, then pauses mid-crunch.

"Uh-oh. He's thinking again." Another throw-and-catch happens, almost absently.

"Did I ever thank you for those long-term projection algorithms you gave me for my security program?" Alan finally asks.

Roy thinks about it, then shrugs. "Eh, depends. Does popcorn count?" Then he has to pause to catch the three rapid-fire kernels Alan throws at him for using That Word.

Success! Bonus Round commences.

"If you have to ask, then no, it doesn't," Alan declares, standing up.

But Flynn knocks on Alan's door before he can say or do anything else. "Hey, Tron. You ready to go?"

Something guarded falls over Alan's features. "Go where?"

"To get our bikes, of course," Flynn answers.

Alan sighs, and doesn't quite manage to hide his grimace as he turns to grab his suit jacket. "Yeah, okay," he agrees reluctantly.

"You comin', Ram?"

And Roy, wilting back into obscurity, lights up at the chance to be part of the Cool Kids Club. "Yeah, sure! One sec."

Alan turns and eyes Flynn while they wait, then gives a nod of acceptance.

The memory froze there, and Alan let the frame settle into his lap.

He'd never really stopped to wonder how Flynn had known Roy; why he'd given the younger programmer a nickname upon meeting, when he never did it for anyone else. Now that he knew the real history behind it, he wanted to be angry. But mostly he felt sad.

Roy hadn't gotten into the Club by his own merit, and not on Alan's metaphorical coattails, as they've drunkenly debated a time or two, but on a memory. He'd been little more than a placeholder for the Program he'd created, and didn't have a clue until Jordan died.

And by then, Alan had gotten so used to Flynn's gravity that he never questioned the growing distance between them; never wondered why a nickname that Flynn himself had bestowed would make Flynn wince – not with grief, Alan now realized, but with guilt.

Flynn had no idea who he's rejected, but maybe Alan's absence from their world will change that.

Alan nodded to himself and set the frame back on the table, its picture shifting to show Jordan with her eyes crossing at a dollop of white on the tip of her nose. He eyed the door about fifteen feet away, jaw clenching with determination, before he stood up on shaky legs.

He was huffing and puffing, his vision threatening to black out, by the time he collapsed against the doorframe. With static buzzing in his ears, Alan fumbled for the doorknob and let it swing open.

Must be an odd, waste-of-space concept to Programs, he thought woozily. *Doors swinging open, instead of sliding . . . .* Even open, though, the doorway might as well have

been a wall to keep Alan from getting through to the hallway beyond. He just didn't have the en-

       -er-

          -gy . . .

Something grabbed him, energy charging through him with an added growl of *Don't do that*.

Alan's startle-stiffened limbs went limp with relief, instinctively recognizing the voice.

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With a little help from Ram, Tron manhandled his father back onto the bed. He pressed his hand against Alan's forehead, stilling the slight back-and-forth motion as Alan blinked like his eyes weren't working. Alan sighed and relaxed at the touch, but didn't fall asleep again.

"There a problem, Ram?" he asked, not looking at the other Program as his thumb started brushing between Alan's eyebrows.

"Problem, no," Ram answered, shifting slightly in the corner of Tron's sightline. "But . . . an oddity, I suppose."

Tron sat down on the bed, instinctively shielding his father's most vital parts from Ram's view. "What's odd?"

Ram raised a brow at his positioning, but answered the question. "This room is keyed to activate when a User becomes active." He waved a hand, indicating the darkness. "Yet he's gone to and from the door, with no change in the lighting." He shrugged. "It's probably a simple solution; just not a question I expected to have."

Tron released a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. "Mostly likely it's keyed specifically to Flynn – that, or Alan didn't see a need for more light."

Ram hummed, musing, "Or, perhaps, your partial Reintegration has made him not read strictly as a User anymore."

Tron's eyes narrowed in thought. "Possible."

"Y'tryin' t'put me back to sleep?" Alan rumbled under his hand.

Tron's thumb stilled as he turned to look at him. "Depends. Do you need more?"

Alan huffed a "No," brushing Tron's hand aside as he sat up . . . and swayed. "But I'll try to take it slower, this time." Tron reached out to steady him as he blinked at Ram. "How long've I been out?"

"Just over –"

"Most of a week," Tron answered. Lightning flashed outside, drawing his attention, "which might explain . . . ." He darted away, grabbing a pitcher and glass tumbler as he slipped out into the storm.

Alan sent Ram a questioning look as distant thunder trailed after him.

"He's been acting like that more than usual," Ram said, shrugging. "Not sure how much of it comes from his time under Clu, how much from you, or if there's a glitch somewhere in between that we need to worry about."

". . . From me?"

Ram cocked his head. "You said at the Arena that you gave him some new code –"

"Not code." Alan interjected, catching on as he leaned back on the pillows. "Memories. Vocabulary for things that probably don't translate very well here –" He paused, seeing Ram's confusion. "We were pretty well merged when I woke up after the Disk transfer. Did what we could to separate out again during the flight out here, but . . ." he shrugged. "Even a cursory scan'll probably show we each left bits of ourselves in the other."

Ram nodded, muttering "One more mystery solved" to himself as Tron came back in with pitcher and glass filled to the brim with fresh energy from the storm, his wet footprints glowing briefly behind him.

"What mystery – Hey! You're getting the bed wet!"

"Not like you can't dry it later," Tron said as he set the pitcher aside and kneed his way up onto the bed. "Here, drink this." He proffered the tumbler.

Alan took it absently. "Are you seriously advocating wasting energy over *not getting the bed wet* in the first place? Who're you and where's Tron?"

"I'm *advocating* that you shut up and drink – *slowly*, Alan."

"Yes, Mother," Alan replied, then chugged the whole thing and held it back out to him with an expecting look, circuitry already surging with light.

Tron scowled. "If you puke, it's not my fault."

"If I puke, it'll be *on you*," Alan rebutted, bumping Tron's shoulder with the glass.

Tron settled back, a foot landing on the floor as his nose wrinkled. "Ew."

"'S your fault. You wet the bed."

It took an extra beat, but Tron's face cleared. "Huh. Punny." Alan grinned and poked him again. "Refill's on the table, Alan."

Alan huffed. "Oh, that's nice," he groused playfully, reaching for the pitcher. "Making the invalid work for his healing. Never knew you were so caring." Tron just smirked as Alan gulped down another glass-and-a-half, before releasing a satisfied sigh as his circuitry settled into a brighter, healthy setting. "Much better. Good thinking, kiddo."

Tron nodded –

"Well, that was . . . different," Ram observed from the other side of the bed.

Two sets of identical eyes flew to meet Ram's gaze before Tron ducked his head slightly, circuits blushing a faint violet in embarrassment at forgetting they had an audience.

Alan, however, just chuckled. "Okay, maybe more than just some vocabulary. You might've inherited my sense of humor, too." He set the tumbler on the bedside table and knuckled his way to sitting up. "So catch me up: What happened? What's going on? And is anyone keeping an eye on Clu?"

"Flynn's attack damaged large portions of the Grid before it focused on you," Ram reported. "A handful of the refugees chose to return to the City a few cycles ago, but most have decided to start building a new City to live in, since the command center is likely compromised. I've contacted Shaddox and a couple others to get that project moving. Zuse – or Castor, as he's calling himself now – has agreed to continue funneling refugees our way, once he's reestablished again, which'll probably take several deca-cycles to accomplish." Ram hesitated, then shrugged. "No word yet on what – if anything – is happening with Clu. There's been no sign of a power vacuum, so it likely didn't affect him –"

"You sound confident the attack was Flynn's doing."

"It had Flynn's signature," Tron said, "and I don't think Roy would've had the time to get to the terminal, let alone decide to destroy everything or focus on you."

Alan mulled on that for a bit, idly chewing at his bottom lip.

"Flynn also made it very clear that he didn't think you were . . . well, *you*, when we were heading for the Portal," Ram said. "Though I still can't quite figure how he decided that. It's not like Clu has the ability to create his own Programs."

Tron shuddered and grimaced. "Oh, yay. New nightmare fodder."

"He didn't seem to know that you and Tron had merged, which I'm pretty sure would've accounted for the 'things you wouldn't know about' he mentioned," Ram continued. . . then paused. "Why didn't you tell him? It would've cleared up a lot of things; maybe even prevent the attack –"

"Would've opened a whole 'nother can of worms," Alan absently corrected him, still processing.

"It would've created more problems," Tron explained at Ram's confused look. "Given Flynn another distraction and excuse to stick around, not to mention an implicit access to me,

which," he shivered again, shaking his head, "I'm nowhere *near* ready for."

Alan put a hand on Tron's knee, comforting as well as grounding him. "What stopped the attack?"

"Haven't figured it out, ye- –"

"Tron."

Tron rolled his eyes. "Ram –"

"You yelled, and everything stopped."

"A coincidence."

"Gem heard you in the infirmary. *I* heard you in the garage –"

"I take it you've been debating this for a while?" Alan asked, amused.

"It was like what you did at the Arena," Ram explained before Tron could get a word in edgewise, "Only the signature was slightly different, and you were still unconscious when we reached you. If you 'left pieces of yourselves in the other' –"

"'One more mystery solved.'"

"Exactly," Ram nodded.

Tron pouted while they shared a grin.

Alan poked his thigh and murmured, "Still a hero," at him.

Tron made a face, but didn't argue. His shoulders straightened a bit, though.

Thunder rumbled one last time as Alan patted Tron's leg again. "Well. I suppose, now we're all back on the same page, I should try this getting up thing again," he said, swinging his feet down to the floor and standing.

The room lit up the second he made contact.

The Programs shared a startled glance.

"That's . . . interesting," Alan said, reeling a little at the light. "Wonder why it didn't do that before."

"We posited some theories earlier," Ram breathed. "Clearly, none of them were accurate. We're still missing something."

"Better find it, then," Alan said, pulling his Disk from its dock and activating it as he sat down again. . . ."Holy *sshiit*."

Tron scooted up behind him, peered over his shoulder, and scowled. "You said you killed the virus."

"I thought I had."

Fresh energy was still filling in the gaps left behind from Flynn's attack, but it was the half-dozen-or-so little red dots spread like chicken pox over Alan's visage that held their horrified attention.

And as they stared, one spot bloomed bigger, seemingly aimed at Alan's heart.

Without thought, Tron reached around Alan and touched its outer edge, quelling its forward momentum. The touch ignited the surrounding code into taking action, forcing the spot to shrink down to almost half of its original size.

Three other spots, in less-vital areas, bloomed out slightly in retribution.

"This is . . . gonna be a problem," Alan said, swallowing hard.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Yet another challenge presents itself.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2

The meeting adjourned with all projects greenlit to begin production, Tron and Shaddox wandering out of the room as they debated over security measures for the new City.

"Ram, you alright?" Alan asked, the Program jerking as he realized the meeting had ended. "You seem awfully distracted today."

"Yes, I think so," Ram answered, slowly melting back down into his seat. "I keep feeling a . . . tug. It's not quite as clear or consistent as a Call, but it's . . . familiar." He shook his head, like he was trying to clear it.

"It's Roy," Tron said, returning to their trinity. "I've felt a similar tug several times over multiple cycles lately, though he seems particularly strong right now. He may be preparing to fix a section of the Grid –"

He and Alan both jumped as a slight jolt zapped through the Grid. As one, they turned to the nearest window, Ram following their gaze as the Portal relit.

"No Users coming through," Tron murmured a moment later. His eyes narrowed. "Maybe a new Program getting uploaded, though."

"Gather a group and go find out," Alan said, nodding. "Try to bring the boat back, too, if it's quiet. We don't need Clu deconstructing it and rebuilding a new weapon."

Tron and Ram both nodded and headed for the door. Then Ram paused and asked, "Wait. You're not coming?"

Alan snorted humorlessly. "User I might be, but I'm still contagious." He raised his hands and wiggled his fingers in the air. "Don't wanna risk spreading this, and newborns have no immune system."

"Newborn *humans*, maybe," Tron countered.

Alan raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms. "Even if the Grid was willing to let me get that far, I suspect *someone* would accidentally-on-purpose try to shove me into the beam." Tron's chin jutted out stubbornly, unashamed at getting caught. Alan couldn't fight back a smile. "And we've got far too much work to do for me to poof out on you now. Or anytime soon, for that matter."

The Grid shivered slightly, proving Tron right: a new Program was being born.

"Better get going, guys," Alan said, gaze drifting back out of the window again. "You can tell me all about your adventure when you get back."

* * * * *

"I feel like I should apologize," Ram murmured over the comline once they were well away from the command center. "I thought I was being subtle, but I must've given something away –"

"No, you didn't," Tron said. "It was a pretty obvious ploy to begin with, and it's not like I've been all that quiet about getting Alan out of here if we ever got the chance." Their lightcycles hummed through the dark silence of the Outlands, Ram's skepticism ringing loud on the empty line. "It was my miscalculation, Ram," Tron tried to clarify. "I reverted to protocols for dealing with Flynn without thinking it through. We'll have to be sneakier if we're going to trick Alan." He peeked away from their path in time to see his friend take a deep breath and nod, shoulders relaxing as he processed the explanation.

"*Trick* Alan1?" Jarrex asked, his 'cycle edging up on Tron's other side. "That doesn't sound like you. What's going on?"

Tron and Ram shared a glance. Dozens of cycles have passed since they discovered the virus eating away at Alan's code, but they haven't figured out a solution for it, or discussed it with anyone.

"Alan's come into contact with Clu's virus multiple times since entering the Grid," Tron said, deciding to keep it vague but mostly truthful. "The attack severely damaged his systems, as well as the Grid, and I'm worried he'll catch it if he runs into it again in his weakened state."

"Alan's refusing to leave the Grid a mess, though," Ram said, picking up the line. "Even though he can do just as much work from his world without the added danger, which is driving Tron a little nuts."

Tron grimaced at him, making Jarrex chuckle and murmur, "Still fighting for the Users."

"Yep," Ram agreed cheekily.

Silence swallowed them again, Jarrex dropping back to guard them as they raced up and off a cliff, their lightcycles shifting into lightjets before they hit the Sea.

Once that bit of excitement ended, Tron debated the merits of their tale: Admitting that Alan had a vulnerability will give Alan an excuse to not interact with every Program who might have an issue or want to meet him, and it will also (hopefully) make the Programs he rescued even more protective of him. But eventually the wrong set of ears will hear of that vulnerability, and Clu will find a way to take advantage of it.

Another problem for another day, he decided as they neared the Portal pillar, shaking away the worry. He had a whole-new situation to focus on, right now.

They landed just as the Portal began to pulse, the new Program's resolution almost complete. "Ram, why don't you go ahead and check on the boat. You'll be able to tell if it's been tampered with." Ram gave him a skeptical look, but headed downstairs without argument. "Keep your comms open!"

"Why? Are you expecting trouble?" Ram asked over the line.

"I don't know what to expect," Tron said as the Portal shut down. A white-lit figure stepped out of its center and began crossing the bridge. "And that bothers me."

Jarrex stepped up to their end of the bridge as the figure – a female, from the look of it – passed the midway point. "Greetings, Program!" he shouted. "How may we designate you?"

"Greetings!" the Program said. Air snagged in Tron's throat, his feet pulling him closer to the bridge. *It can't be –* "I am Rom_Yori. How may I be of serv- –"

She paused as their gazes met, a faint confusion blanking out her friendly smile.

"Yori," he breathed, stepping closer and reaching for her. "Do you remember me? It's been a long ti- –"

*"Tron, **don't**!"* Ram yelled –

Yori's circuits flickered, an expression Tron had never seen on her face distorting her features as she snarled and jumped at him.

Reflex alone had him grabbing her wrists and falling to the ground, using her momentum to throw her over his head and away from him. He winced in sympathy as she slammed upside-down and backside-first into the rock surrounding the bridge plateau. He rolled onto all fours while she gasped for breath. "Yori," he said, trying to infuse calm into his voice, "why are you attacking me? I'm not your –"

Her circuits flashed red, and she charged at him again.

Jarrex tackled her away, putting himself between Tron and the new Program. "I think you should maybe disappear for awhile, Sir," he said, lighting his Disk. "At least until we have a better sense of what's going on."

Ram clamored up from the stairs, chest heaving as he reappeared a few feet away from Yori. Tron and Jarrex both tensed –

"Greetings. Are you Ram?" Yori asked, circuits suddenly bleached of red as she stands again.

"I am," Ram said, eyeing her warily.

"I am Yori," she said, offering her hand. "I am to guard the Portal and help you quell the Traitor's rebellion –"

"Sir, *go*," Jarrex hissed at him.

And Tron went. He slipped off the edge next to the bridge, using its power to mask the glow of his distress until the others were well on their way home.

He still wasn't ready to face anyone when he got there.

* * * * *

He found his son in one of the abandoned top floors, huddled in an empty corridor. Alan leaned against the wall next to him and sighed, letting his legs melt underneath him until he landed barely an inch away – not-quite-touching, but present.

And waited, at a loss for what to say first.

"Yori's dead," Tron finally said, voice hollow. "She died getting Quorra to safety, and that *mockery* of her thinks *I'm* the monster." His eyes shimmered with tears, one slipping out as he leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Alan said. "I'm sorry I didn't protect her; sorry I didn't know – didn't *act* – sooner, sorry I waited for Flynn to tell me what was going on –"

"You gonna apologize for Lora taking the D.C. job the night you were gonna propose, too?" Tron asked dryly, peeking at Alan from the corner of his eye. "'Cause that's not your fault, either."

Alan bit back another sigh. "I'm sorry Flynn screwed her up and used Roy to hurt you."

Direct hit. The stoic mask dropped, Tron's face crumpling as Alan pulled his son close to hide the tears when the sobs broke free.

Chapter End Notes

This is the last I've got for Recovery. From here on it'll mostly be a prompt-fill posting.

Should I start posting Renegade next week, or allow a week to pass between fics?

End Notes

Thoughts/questions/opinions? I take no issue with shouting. :-)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!