

**Magdalena volume 1: Interview with AIGEN (Andinan Intergalactic Entertainment Network)**

***"You think men are intimidated by strong women? Imagine telling them you contain the soul of a world eating dragon. Good luck hearing back from them after that!"***

***-Alessandra, The Magdalena***

The camera drone turned its lights on as the lens it carried flashed momentarily before zooming in on her face. Alessandra smiled, that same meticulous smile that won over men, women, and planets of every species across the cosmos. She hated these interviews, something about staring at the camera, and pretending it was a person, seemed fake to her. But if she really thought about it there were millions of viewers behind that little drone, so she was talking to people. More importantly this specific interview was for AIGEN, the predominant media company of her homeworld, which meant this was for her people. That made it tolerable, Andinan pride was an important metric and she loved her people. She would show everyone watching just what it meant to be one of them.

Then the smaller microdrones started moving around her, their tiny cameras targeting specific parts of her body that appeared on the large overhead screen. These streams were used as live feeds to create a holographic presence for those who had the technology, or just feed images to those who didn't. There was a time where she would have been offended, nervous, or even angry about such objectification; but not anymore. She was the most powerful woman in known space, people wanted to see her, their motives beyond that were their own. She changed her smile, just slightly showing a hint of innuendo and flexed her muscles, causing veins of fiery power to trace along her body. This is what they wanted to see. The days of self doubt and fear were long gone. Alessandra was a goddess; powerful, beautiful, deadly, and invincible. She had long since learned to not blame them for wanting to see her.

Another screen turned on, displaying the face a woman Alessandra did not know; she must be the interviewer. The woman looked at her and smiled, a wide fake and atrocious thing, the kind of smile you learned in a media factory. The woman was Andinan, she had the right facial features, but her hair and eye color didn't match their people, instead she was a tailor made persona for the masses. Alessandra hated her immediately. "Greetings to everyone in our cosmic audience this evening, this is Kahrin. Tonight we have a very special guest with us, The Magdalena." She smiled that fake wide mouthed grin.

"No." The woman's smile dropped just a little and she paled, the stream was already live. "This is my first interview with AIGEN, and you give me someone named Kahrin, with the fakest smile I have ever seen?" She glanced at another camera and saw a young more traditional appearing Andinan woman carrying a tray of food and drinks for the crew. "Her." She pointed. "She interviews me or this is over."

"Her?" Kahrin's voice sounded incredulous. "Ch'aska is just a runner she has no idea how to..."

Alessandra killed the stream, and waited. It took them more than a few minutes to request another connection, but she had learned patience long ago. When the stream reinitialized the young Andinan woman she'd pointed out earlier was sitting there, still dressed in her same clothes, and looking very nervous. "Um.. Hello." The young woman swallowed nervously, while looking at a smartscreen she was holding. "They gave me a list of questions."

Alessandra smiled. "Forget about those." The young woman's eyes widened, making her look something like a Phaelusian space cow caught in a hunter's net. "You are Andinan, ask me what you really want to know." The young woman swallowed, still looking very nervous. Alessandra leaned forward, placing her chin on her interwoven hands, and smiled encouragingly. "They won't do anything to you, you are under my protection, and this conversation is just between me and you."

The young woman smiled, as something in her demeanor changed. She put down the smart screen and looked Alessandra in the eyes. "My name is Ch'aska and I'm so pleased to meet you." She looked off screen at someone for another moment, then looked back at Alessandra. "What is it like being an intergalactic hero and an Andinan woman?"

Alessandra sat back up and nodded. "That is the right question." She looked at her viewport's screen, at the stars and the large orange and brown planet far below her. She didn't look back at the cameras as she started talking, it was good to let them see her thoughtful side too. "Andina is a small world, we have never been powerful or wealthy in the grand scheme of things." She touched her viewport's screen gently, watching it subtly light up around her fingers. Then she released a very small amount of her power, making her eye facing the cameras light up with her inner fire. "This has always been especially true for our women. We're respected and valued in the home, as matriarchs for our families, and elders. But not where real power matters, such as in the military or government." She looked back at the screen to see Ch'aska nodding.

"What changed that for you?"

Alessandra leaned back and smiled, steepling her fingers. It was an excellent question, touching upon the event that started everything. "That is a good question, it wasn't like this for me at the beginning." She laughed a little thinking about it. "When I first got my powers, becoming The Magdalena, I wasn't sure of myself at all."

Ch'aska forgot herself for a moment and laughed, it was nice to see. "Really?"

"Yes. For a while I couldn't believe that a young Andinan woman, me, a complete nobody, got all that power. Did you know, that's why they chose me? Because I was nothing to them, and if they succeeded I could be controlled. But they weren't counting on just how much power they gave

me, or on what I learned growing up in the mountains of Andina.” She narrowed her eyes, meeting Ch’aska’s gaze. “Andinan women cannot be controlled, we are a force, not a weakness.”

In that moment, during that brief silent pause, they looked at one another and understood. Then Ch’aska smiled. “Was there a specific event that changed your perspective?”

Alessandra kept her answer simple, allowing the other woman to investigate further and keep things more interesting for the audience. “Jal’Harak and The Vishaa.”

“I still remember hearing about that when I was a little girl, after that everyone knew who our people were. It was your first mission as The Magdalena right? Can you tell us about it?”

Alessandra smiled, the young woman caught on quickly. “Of course, everyone knows the story of the multi planet community founded colony of Jal’Harak, so I won’t bore you with the details of that. But the event around the Vishaa is what really shaped my destiny as a hero.” She paused for a moment while looking out her viewport’s screen again, thoughtful. “Before that I didn’t really know who I was or what was going on. I’d been given these powers, and I was still living in a UHDF research facility. They let me watch the news, but I had no contact with anyone, and was being constantly monitored, taught, trained, and tested.” She looked back at the camera and Ch’aska. “Then I saw The Vishaa on a newscast.” Alessandra leaned forward towards the camera, closed one fist and put it into the palm of her other hand, before lighting her eyes on fire. “The colony needed the water aboard that ship and it was going to crash. They weren’t going to help them. So I decided to break out of there, take a transporter portal, and save them myself. It was the first time I’d ever really used my powers and defied orders.” She relaxed and allowed her eyes to dim. “That was the day I decided what type of hero I was going to be, what kind of woman I was going to be.”

“They didn't try to stop you or arrest you afterwards?”

Alessandra smiled wickedly. “Oh, they tried. Both attempts failed and cost them a paladin class destroyed.”

Ch'aska looked stunned for a brief moment, but then she smiled, by now most knew exactly how strong The Magdalena was. “You are a truly remarkable woman. Are you worried about speaking so candidly? The UHDF must really hate their secrets being shared so openly.”

Alessandra laughed. “What are they going to do? Fire me? That would make my life a lot easier.” She looked at the camera and winked. “They always decide to lose a few more destroyers.”

Ch'aska laughed also, then nodded. “Still, you must be very challenging for them to deal with? I am sure they don't enjoy it much.”

“I am and they don't. But the reality is that they need me, I am one of the few weapons the AI haven't been able to replicate, and I am stronger than anything else the UHDF has.”

Ch'aska nodded, the look of pride obvious on her face, Andinan women were few and they always supported one another. “What about dating? It must be very difficult being who you are.”

“A complete waste of time.” She waved her hand dismissively. “You think men are intimidated by strong women? Imagine telling them you contain the soul of a world eating dragon. Good luck hearing back from them after that!”

Ch'aska choked on the water she was sipping and took a moment to gather herself. “Even so, rumor has it that you once dated Admiral Ondo?”

Alessandra leaned forward and smiled, as if she was sharing a secret with her close friend. "I was for a short time, unfortunately." She held up her hand, with the thumb and forefinger just a little apart. "That man has far too much little starship energy for me, it was atrocious."

Both women laughed together, for probably longer than they should have, until finally Ch'aska gathered herself and asked another question. "What's your least favorite thing about being The Magdalena?"

"Definitely clothing, it's so expensive. Do you have any idea how many outfits I've shredded over the years? I don't even get to wear most of them a second time!"

Ch'aska laughed again, obviously having completely forgotten they were talking in front of millions. "You are not anything like what most would expect."

Alessandra smiled. "Once you are what others expect you have lost part of yourself." Then a red light triggered on her own smartscreen. "I am afraid that I have to go, someone needs me."

Ch'aska nodded, not looking disappointed at all. The woman was young, but she was sharp. "Thank you for your time Magdalena, it has been a pleasure."

Alessandra smiled and nodded back in return. "Indeed. I like you Ch'aska, you should call my people."

Ch'aska's eyes widened but she smiled. "I will, thank you."

"Cuidakuy kuyasqay amistadniy. Inti hina thak kay tiyaykuchun." *Take care my dear friend. May peace settle upon you like the sun.* Alessandra cut the feed, but not before she saw Ch'aska's light up with an even bigger smile and a look of joy appear in the young woman's eyes.