

Lockheed Elite

Tyler Wandschneider

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Never failing to entertain, Lockheed Elite establishes characters who could recur in a series that would find a loyal audience.

Tyler Wandschneider's *Lockheed Elite* stands out as a captivating, well-plotted science fiction novel that's loaded with action and intrigue. The book packs as much of a punch as *Severn*, a swashbuckling new starship recruit who's asked to prove her mettle by sparring with two "enormous meatheads" in a bar. It's a rollicking sci-fi tale with twists and turns one does not always see coming.

The book stars a *Firefly*-like motley crew helmed by Captain Anders Lockheed. After an undercover operative turns up unexpectedly, under pressure from both the military and underworld types ruthless enough to torture and threaten, Lockheed's titular elite team breaks into a museum to steal mechs in a heist that seems increasingly impossible to pull off.

Characters are developed well as the book progresses, each getting well-drawn personalities and believable motivations. The book can feel contemporary and relatable even though it's set in the far future. The crew, for instance, sits around and sips whiskey after defeating several goons, brainstorming about how to remove an explosive collar from a crew member's neck. "Don't lose your head over it," says one crew member, and the others chastise him for the comment.

The book sometimes presents characters in a cartoonish good-or-evil light at the expense of complexity and realism. Anders and his crew, for instance, decide against using lethal force in a standoff where they could be killed for reasons that feel designed to depict them as virtuous:

If you killed with options left, killing only got easier, and before you knew it, you'd gone way too far and become just another roughneck crew flying without a moral compass. He wanted better for his crew. They were the best, and they'd stay that way.

Much emphasis is placed on how Anders aspires to have the best crew. His team is given many opportunities to show off over the course of a narrative that feels like it could play out on screen. The story often owes a debt to the science fiction canon but is written so clearly and smoothly that it feels fresh and original.

Dialogue sparkles throughout. Conversations come across as fluid and realistic, and they sometimes express profundity. One character explains the idea of trust to an amnesiac: "It takes time. The longer someone doesn't hurt you, the more you can trust they won't."

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JOSEPH S. PETE (August 16, 2017)

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