

Mech Touch 6176

Chapter 6176 The Weight of Responsibility

When Ves finally made contact with Ketis by remote, the latter looked a little glum.

This was a rather uncharacteristic appearance from the young Journeyman. Ketis had always been positive, upbeat and confident about herself and her future.

Yet now, Ketis' mood and posture made no attempts to hide her disappointment.

"Meow."

Lucky, who had previously been resting on Ves' desk, noticed the swordmaster's depression. The gem cat jumped from his perch and flew over to the physical projection of the Swordmaiden mech designer.

The arrival of the cat succeeded in lifting her mood, if only by a small extent.

"Oh, hey, Lucky. It has been a long time since we met each other." Ketis said as she held the gem cat in her arms. "How are you doing as of late? Are Ves and Gloriana's children keeping you company?"

"Meow meow meow."

Ketis spent a little time indulging herself in cat therapy before she shifted her attention back to Ves.

"I suppose you did not call me because you wanted me to reconnect with Lucky."

Ves nodded. "We need to discuss the follow-up arrangements of Task Force Solus. Now that the Emperor Tree is out of the way, how much progress has been made to take control over the major Solus Gas deposit?"

"It is taking a long time for the Larkinson Biotech Institute to examine and clear out the massive root system underground." Ketis reported to Ves. "That doesn't stop us from disassembling Chimera Base back into modular construction parts before bringing them over to the Emperor Tree Clearing in a much more strategically important location. Emperor Base is still under construction, so it will take time before we can begin to harvest large volumes of Solus Gas."

The harvesting and export of Solus Gas was a key part of Ves' future plans. The exotic gas had already demonstrated many amazing capabilities that could make any Larkinson mech a lot more powerful.

Chimera Base previously hosted a small gas harvesting operation, but so little Solus Gas sputtered out from that minor deposit that it could never satisfy the demand of the Larkinson Clan!

This time was different. Once Emperor Base got up and running, the Larkinsons could finally harvest and make use of as much Solus Gas that the Emperor Tree previously monopolized!

This was the greatest benefit of eliminating that tall and incredibly resilient calamity plant.

There were many possible uses of Solus Gas. Ves already intended to build a huge stockpile of it in reserve for the purpose of producing or upgrading every Larkinson mech with alloys laced with this special material.

What excited Ves the most was that Task Force Solus already managed to harvest enough Solus Gas to upgrade the Dark Zephyr with this material!

Unfortunately, upgrading the masterwork archemehch with altered alloys that included Solus Gas was incredibly tedious and troublesome.

It would have been much more convenient if the Dark Zephyr Mark III incorporated these highly anticipated materials, but Task Force Solus hadn't made as much progress at the time.

Oh well. At least the process of upgrading the Dark Zephyr to a first-class ace mech gave the Larkinsons a chance to incorporate this overdue upgrade.

Ves was glad that he did not have to address this headache in person. He already delegated this problem to Gloriana and Master Benedict.

"So how are the risk factors on the surface of Reticula Corein V? Have the other calamity beasts shown any signs of movement?"

"Not for the time being." Ketis shook her head. "Our ships in orbit and the probes that we have sent to their gas-filled locations have not detected any indication that they are preparing to attack Emperor Base. This can change at any second, so true safety can never be guaranteed unless our clan takes full control over every corner of the globe."

"That is not possible for the time being. The Red War takes precedence. This is also why it is about time to transfer Venerable Dise, Venerable Joshua, their expert mechs and a large proportion of Task Force Solus back to the expeditionary fleet. If they begin to move out in time, they can catch up to the first battles that will soon break out across the border regions."

The swordmaster sighed. "I understand the need to reinforce the expeditionary fleet, but... the situation on the ground is not yet stable. If a calamity beast decides to attack Emperor Base one day, there is no way the garrison forces over there can defeat this opponent."

"It's okay, Ketis. Whoever is left can evacuate the base. It's just a bunch of construction material and so on. We can always come back later and try to gain a foothold on the planet again. It is more important to end your mission and get back to what is important. Don't you want to return to the expeditionary fleet and fight against our real enemies?"

The woman looked glum again. "I do, but..."

Ves narrowed his eyes. He already guessed why she was in this mood.

"What is wrong?"

"I feel like a failure." His former student frankly admitted. "I tried my best to exercise operational command over Task Force Solus. I set up the missions that allowed us to fulfill several goals, but also cause our clan to suffer severe losses in return. We had no choice but to exile Taon and Lanie. Isobel also came very close to dying, and needs to undergo heavy treatments for several years in order to regain her health. I could have prevented all of these losses from happening."

"Meow meow..."

Lucky tried to console the swordmaster by acting cute, but it was a pity that Ketis was too obsessed with her perceived failures to pay attention.

Ves stepped closer and slowly reached out to place a hand on her shoulder.

"Failure is a part of commanding troops in battle. No fight can proceed without losses. Haven't you forgotten that everytime a mech pilot steps onto a battlefield, they already considered the faint but realistic possibility that they may never return alive? When Taon and Lanie agreed to take part in that ill-fated mission, they accepted the risks, knowing that they can never stay safe if they want to push themselves beyond their limits. Neither of them died in the end, so the worst did not happen. That is actually a pretty good outcome. Even if they died, that is no reason for you to beat yourself up. Losses happen. All you can do is to learn from your mistakes and try your best to avoid a repeat."

Ketis grimaced and firmed up a little. "I am not unused to seeing the people around me die. I am a Swordmaiden, remember? It is just that this is the first time that it happened under my command, and to people who I care about more than most. I was eager to prove myself, you know. In the end, my decisions were partially responsible for giving Taon and Lanie life-long trauma and nightmares."

"You'll get over it." Ves reassured her. "As long as you continue to stay in charge, your troops will suffer more and more losses. This is an inevitability. Once the deaths reach a certain scale, you will no longer take it personally anymore. Trust me. It happened to me as well. Remember all of those big and painful battles we fought back in the old galaxy? I used to take the losses hard as well, but I learned from those ordeals and made my clan stronger so that it is no longer prone to losing half of our troops just to win a pyrrhic victory. That is progress."

For whatever reason, Ketis did not welcome's opinion.

"Honestly, Ves, I don't want to become like you. I don't want to see so many people who have put their trust in me die because they misjudged me. I never imagined that the weight of responsibility is so heavy. I could bear the weight during times of peace as mistakes are never fatal, but now that I have led Task Force Solus on this dangerous planet, I am afraid that I do not have what it takes to become a field commander."

Ves smiled but shook his head as he gazed into her eyes. "You are a Journeyman and a swordmaster. That is already impressive enough. There is no reason for you to excel at field command as well. Leave these sorts of operations to professionally trained military officers such as Commander Casella Ingvar. That does not mean that there is no place for you in the hierarchy. Instead of trying to make so many important decisions yourself, you should delegate more responsibilities to your staff. Your job is to set the goals and other high-level directives of your unit. Let the underlings below you figure out all of the detailed stuff."freewebnovel_com

That put Ketis to thought. Though Task Force Solus definitely had a robust staff that already took care of such matters, she never gave them the credit they deserved. Perhaps it was a mistake to pay too much attention to the frontline combatants as it caused her to neglect her staff.

"I suppose you are right, Ves."

"No. Stay. I know you feel bad about yourself, but you are making a mountain out of a molehill. Regardless of whether you are suited for command or not, you cannot escape this responsibility. This is the only way you can effectively grow as a swordmaster. The only other alternative is to completely disregard your safety as well as the cruelty of modern warfare by taking part in every infantry action in person. You can only truly do this by boarding enemy starships that have already been crippled and secured from the outside, and even then there are a lot of risks."

"Do you still want to exercise command during the upcoming campaigning?" Ves inquired. "There may be cases where the expeditionary fleet will split up or send small detachments to reinforce the defenses of different locations. There is still room for you to be in charge. I know it is important for you to remain involved in real conflict in order to promote your swordmaster progression."

Ketis paused for a moment before lowering her head. "It is not the only method. I think... I may not be suited to exercise this responsibility. Maybe it is time for me to distance myself from the action and join you over at Diandi Base so that I can design my mechs in peace for a few years."

Ves frowned. He would welcome her arrival, but he did not think that was the best course of action for her. Ketis was an even more extreme 'mech designer' than himself. As a true swordmaster, how could she possibly distance herself from the blood and fire of true warfare?

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"That is still a better alternative than putting myself in charge of troops and having them die due to my mistakes."

"Ketis, Ketis, Ketis. I won't force you to do something against your will, but please reconsider your decisions. Once you return to the expeditionary fleet, you should go and visit Commander Casella Ingvar and hear what she has to say about your experiences. Promise me that you will have a good talk with her. If you have done that and still decide to relinquish your command responsibilities, then so be it. I hope you will change your mind, though."

"Why do you care so much about this, Ves?"

"Because there are very few people I trust with my back, Ketis. There are so many new people in my clan that the overwhelming majority are strangers to me. Sure, we have the Golden Cat bringing us together, but this is only partially effective. As my power and influence grows, it becomes more important to build an inner circle consisting of comrades who I can absolutely depend upon in good times as well as bad times. You have stuck with me in both situations. I haven't forgotten about that. This is why you must be capable of assuming greater responsibility in my absence. I don't have many people I can count upon."