

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 1: Chasm

Story Notes:

I don't own, nor did I create these characters - It's all WEP. I did create the plot and most of the scenes.

Author's Chapter Notes:

New story. Many chapters are written and I have postponed posting it because I wanted to make sure the story was consistent. But I lost patience. Enjoy!

Keith closed his eyes as he was propelled upwards through the vertical tunnel. The air was cool as he ascended and he savored the breeze on his face. Soft, green lights marked his face and his ride came to a quick stop. The door in front of him opened without so much as a nod. Even as a pilot from a technologically advanced galaxy, he would never get used to the way the Castle of Lions appeared to have a mind of its own – doors opening and closing, lights flickering on and off, computers springing to life upon his approach – all without the direct hand of man. He much preferred the wooden doors with knobs and the “on” button of a personal laptop of his youth. But more than anything, after three years on Arus, Keith could not get used to the loss of life that came with his line of work. Today had been a particularly trying battle, and he was weary.

He was always the last to return to the castle, for he felt it his duty as captain to insure all of his team was safely aground before he was – much akin to the captain going to down with the ship. As the door to Castle Control slid open to beeping computers, blinking lights and the stale warmth of machine, Keith stepped out. The door closed quietly behind him and he looked up to see his team standing in wait. He watched them all with somber admiration for their efforts today. Lance was leaning against the wall, lost in a gaze. Keith knew that expression very well, and was certain Lance was reliving details of the battle in his mind. The giant form of Hunk was shoeless and on the floor rubbing his foot which had swollen a great deal the fall his lion had taken. Pidge was fidgeting with a gadget in his hand, taking out his frustration on a machine he could control. Princess Allura sat at the main computer next to Coran. Her head rested on her hand as she gazed at the screen before her.

Keith followed her gaze and saw the aftermath of their battle with Haggar's latest robeast on the wide overhead screen. Empty streets and rubble moved before them as the castle scanner worked to detect life forms. Although the computers hummed and beeped, the right beeps were not announced and he knew they had lost that village. This had been a tough one, and it was time for debriefing.

“Team,” he said, clearing his throat. The bedraggled team shuffled around to look at their captain, each with a need for answers in their eyes. Keith wished he had some. “You did a great job today. It was a tough battle. We won. Don't forget that.”

“Damnit! Keith, we lost a whole village, if not more. Those people are dead and we could have stopped it. But you had us retreat! Is that how you measure success?” Lance struck out as he

walked up to the captain. Keith could feel Lance's hot breath on his face as his friend stood before him and glared. Neither looked down at the other as their heights were equal, but Keith's erect posture and thicker build made it appear he towered over the leaner, round-shouldered Lance.

"Lance, we did what we could. We got there as fast as we could. We destroyed the robeast before more were killed. THAT is how I am measuring success. It's the best I can give you," Keith retorted, keeping his anger in check as he looked directly at his contentious friend. He knew Lance was a hot-head, but tonight it wore on the captain. He was tired, his body and heart ached from the battle. He knew his team suffered too, but the loss of the village was on his shoulders. He felt guilty and it ate at him like a demon. The introspection caused his frustration with Lance to suddenly subside. Keith looked into the eyes of each pilot. "I am responsible for the loss of the village. I don't want any of you to take the blame. Don't be hard on yourselves. I made the command to hold back as the village was destroyed."

Keith waded a look at the Princess. It was her he was most concerned about. Those were her people who had died today, and he felt he let her down.

"Ha! I'll say," Lance said as he took a step back from Keith, feeling he had gotten his point across.

"Captain, with all due respect, no one is to blame except the rulers of Doom. Your decision to retreat at the moment of destruction was simply coincidence, and you probably kept your team alive by doing so. You returned to defeat the forces of Doom when it was safe. Do not blame yourself, Captain." The soothing voice of Coran filled Keith's ears and he sighed. He looked at the cloaked man standing next to the princess and he felt a fleeting moment of gratitude. Occasionally this loyal advisor fumed with frustration at the decisions Keith made, but today, for some reason unknown to Keith, he was supportive.

"We'll continue the debriefing tomorrow, team. Go get some rest," Keith conceded, with a nod of thanks to Coran. He watched as Pidge walked quickly behind the hobbling Hunk and the fuming Lance in their exit.

Keith turned to the Princess who remained seated at the Castle Control. "Princess?" he said as he walked toward her. She turned her eyes to his and he stopped. "I am sorry," he said as he bowed and walked out of the room.

Keith walked into his quarters and sat on the edge of his bed. He contemplated the empty look in the eyes of the Princess when he bowed to her as he mindlessly undressed and walked to the shower. The water turned on automatically as he stepped on the bathmat and he commanded the computer to increase the temperature. His muscles ached from the battle, and he realized that had been happening more and more lately. *Am I getting old? I feel so tense when I am out there fighting. It doesn't come easily anymore. Why?* No matter, Keith knew tomorrow his body would feel worse than today, it always did. He breathed in the steam and felt the therapeutic fingers of the pelting water soften his skin and reach his muscles. His shoulders loosened and he felt cleansed and nourished.

Towelings off, Keith dressed in his cotton night pants and walked to the fireplace he was now so thankful for. The cool spring evening had a bite to it and this was an evening to be completely embraced by all things warm. He crouched down and started a roaring fire, sat on the bearskin rug in front of the blaze and stared into the flame. *I should write reports tonight, but I need a break*, Keith thought to himself. *Why do I feel like I have been letting everyone down lately? This is the second difficult battle this week. I am so tired of people dying. So tired...*

Wrapped up in his thoughts, he only stared at the pile of papers needing attention on his desk until a quiet rapping came on his door. Keith walked to the door and found the Princess on the other side. She stared at him, only slightly distracted by his shirtless form as she stood straight and tall.

“Captain. You are not to blame either. Don’t doubt your skills as a leader. Please. We need you to be strong. You hold us together.” The Princess continued to look at him directly, and he was transfixed. He heard her speak and felt the warmth in her words, but her eyes betrayed something else. Was it Anger? Frustration? Keith couldn’t tell.

“Thank you, Princess,” he muttered in response.

“Good night... Keith,” the Princess stammered as she turned and walked away.

The door swished shut and Keith settled in by the fire again. He should have said something more to the Princess, but what was there left to say? The burden was his, and he had to figure out where he went wrong. The idea of tackling this big question brought a wave of fatigue to Keith and he retreated to his bed where sleep came quickly.