

The locker room stank. It was a common misconception that Duros couldn't smell because of their lack of nostril appendages. Xantros could most definitely smell and currently was wishing he couldn't. The locker room was cramped and shoddy at best. Clearly its heyday was several decades past.

TuQ'uan slumped down on the bench next to him. Ripping open his locker and tossing in a sweat soaked rag. Xantros gave a sigh of relief when TuQ'uan pulled out a bottle of spray deodorant and dosed his body with it. Xantros's eyes teared up as he squinted against the onslaught of the aerosol propelled fragrance. *I thought this couldn't get worse*, he thought, staring at TuQ'uan in disgust.

The clamour in the locker room abruptly came to a stop. Xantros looked up and saw that Kamjin, one of their team captains, had entered. He looked exhausted as he gently swatted Arch out of the way with his playbook.

"Have a seat, gentle beings," Kamjin said, though he was looking directly at Arch and Alaris. There was a general bustling as people slid in on the benches to make room for their fellow teammates. As they settled in they all turned expectantly towards their captain. He began to pace, slowly, through the gap in the middle of the locker room.

"I'm not as young as I used to be. That's to be expected. I'm older, slower, my focus has shifted from one goal to many. You don't expect me to be the leader of the pack. It's only fair. Why expect me to be at the head of the team. You'd expect it to be one of you. You're younger, stronger, many of you more skilled than I ever was. That's what you'd expect," Kamjin began.

Xantros noticed as Kamjin took a breath that no one else in the room was moving. No sound was uttered. It was as if there was Kamjin under the pale, flickering lights, and the rest of the team was the void staring at it. He smiled, politely, at that thought.

"Right now, we're down against the Rotworms. People would expect that as well. Look at their team. They've got contenders. People you'd expect to be in the lead. Raleien, Thran, Khryso, DarkHawk, and Qormus; you expect them to be fighters. Raw on the field of competition. Hungry, thirsty, savage! We expected them to come out fighting and they did," Kamjin sighed, as he turned to face the team. Rolling up his playbook.

"Here's the thing about expectations. They're chains. They hold you in place and weigh you down. They're forged by your friends, your fans, your clans but you're the ones shackling them to yourselves. Will you run the play right? Will you catch the ball? Will you score a point? You're expected to be professionals. You're expected to do it right. You're expected to win and the moment you don't meet your expectations you're a failure," he looked them each in the eye in turn. "That's right, a failure. You failed to meet the expectation."

Xantros started to stand but a gentle hand was placed upon him by Kamjin. Looking up, Xantros saw a most unexpected sight. Tears. Literal tears in the eyes of a man whom he had seen mow down enemies on the field of battle with not even a blink.

“That’s what you were all telling yourselves before I walked in,” he smirked. “But I also expected you to fail.” He quickly held up his hands and continued on without missing a beat. “We all fail. I’ve failed. I will fail again. Failure isn’t the end. It is the beginning. It’s when you look at what you’ve done and say to yourself ‘not again’. You’ve seen what doesn’t work and you’ve seen what they’ve done that has.”

“The Rotworms are over in their locker room slapping themselves on the back thinking they’ve won. I can feel the excitement permeating through the stadium. They’re not thinking about us. They’re not thinking about the game. They’re not thinking about how to stay sharp. Because they **expect** to win and those very chains will tie them to their fate.”

Xantros felt the energy in the room ramp up with each subsequent word. His fellow FrogDogs were stomping their feet, palming their fists, yelling their own encouragement. Xantros himself felt giddy with anticipation to get back out on the field.

“So while they’re living in the future of their expected win; I expect each of you to read down deep. To find the energy to push further. To focus clearer. To play harder. I expect you all to do what you’ve been trained to do. Not for fear of failure, that’s already happened. But for fear of letting the Rotworms write your fate. I expect you to be what you’ve always been. Champions.”

As that final word rang past Kamjin’s lips the locker room erupted. Like a long simmering fire given fresh wood the flames of victory whooshed into the air. The room felt brighter to Xantros. The smell was sweeter and as they rushed out of the locker room he knew they’d be hoisting the trophy tonight.