
Any Landing You Can Walk Away From...

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Get up! Get up quickly – we must get ready!

T'yan rolled over and opened one eye a fraction. It took a moment or two to remember what was to happen today. Today the dragons were to become airborne for the first time. Today they showed the class that Jugurth was much bigger and stronger than the rest of them.

And more handsome, put in Jugurth urgently.

Yes, of course, more handsome, agreed T'yan. *Everyone knows that.* He pushed back the blankets and sat up, yawning massively. Why was he taking so long to wake up properly? Why was there no noise from the rest of the barracks? And why was it only half-light outside...?

Jugurth, it is barely past dawn! he exclaimed. *Jallori won't let anyone fly for hours yet!*

I know. But I have to bathe and be oiled before I fly. That will take a long time. The bronze had risen from his sleeping place by T'yan's bunk and was now genteelly preening one wing.

But you don't need to be oiled to fly, protested T'yan, suspecting he knew where this was leading.

Yes, I do. I will be high in the sky and everyone will see me. Gold Yttrith will be there. I must look my best.

T'yan scowled. *Yttrith's your sister!* Dragons had strange ideas about some things...

She is a gold. I must look my best for all the golds. They will look up and see me flying. I need to be oiled.

He gave a sigh of exasperation. *I oiled you yesterday!*

Yes, but I flapped very hard during exercises and now I am dusty. My hide no longer shines. You must oil me again. Dragon eyes regarded him with insistence.

"Oh, all right," he muttered under his breath, hauling himself out of bed. Sometimes Jugurth was a bit *too* picky about his looks. But then again... it wouldn't hurt to show up the others in appearance as well as flying prowess, would it?

I am flying! I am flying! Jugurth launched himself from the Weyrling cliff and flapped enthusiastically over the sea. It had taken many strenuous attempts but now he was indeed aloft. The bronze twisted his neck to look back at where T'yan stood on the cliff top Drilling Ground, and inadvertently changed the attack angle of his wings. He rapidly lost height and crash-landed in the shallows with a startled *Awrk!*

Are you alright? T'yan asked anxiously, pounding down the path to the Weyrling Beach.

Yeess... replied Jugurth, as if unsure of the answer. He floundered ashore and shook water from his wings, showering T'yan with droplets. Above them one of the greens leapt gracefully from the cliff and began to flap in a much more controlled curve towards the beach. **Nusrath says I must come back and try again. He says I must pay more attention next time.**

Well then, better get started. T'yan threw a companionable arm over his bondmate's neck as they climbed back up to the edge of the Drilling Ground where the rest of the class was lined up for their maiden flights. They joined the back of the queue where the others who had already flown waited.

"Bad luck on the landing," said Ryuri. Her Ceorth had been a bit wobbly on take off, but had made a perfect touchdown in the sea and swum back enthusiastically to await another go.

T'yan gave an embarrassed shrug and slapped his bronze affectionately on the neck. "Practice makes perfect, I suppose. He'll be chasing golds in no time, won't you, Jugurth?"

The object of this boasting, however, was not paying attention, but had settled down to lick the soles of his forefeet with meticulous care.



Jugurth's next three flights of that day were better, if not exactly graceful affairs. Landing tended to involve a very big splash. The class for the day ended with T'yan feeling proud that his bronze was getting the hang of flying, if a little jealous that some of the smaller dragons were more adept and confident in the air. He had somehow thought that dragons would do everything aerial by instinct, rather like a newly foaled runner finding its feet. It was a surprise to find that they needed so much practice.

The fact that Jugurth was a bronze, wasn't helping. Bronzes should be biggest and best at everything! But Jallori said that his very size might be the problem – she had warned in lectures that Jugurth, Yttrith and the browns might be slower to take off and more ponderous in the air, because of their sheer size. Yes, that must be it, T'yan decided – even at this young age, Jugurth was noticeably bigger than his blue and green siblings. He just needed a bit more practice and everything would work out fine.



For today's flying lesson, the dragonets were to take off and land on the Drilling Grounds. Their first dry land touchdown. T'yan grinned at his bronze, as Jugurth beat his wings in a couple of vigorous downstrokes and leapt into the air. Hah! Now *that* was a good take off. Bigger body or not, his dragon had now mastered the wingbeats needed to make his ascent look like that of the smallest, lightest green. His smug feeling was echoed by similar sentiments from the bronze.

You're flying well, he told his dragon.

Overhead, Jugurth began to turn onto the path dictated by Weyrlingsecond Jallori and Nusrath, clearing the take off area for the next in line. ***I am flying very well***, Jugurth agreed regally. ***My hide gleams and all the golds can see me***. With a flick of his wings, the young bronze added a couple of swoops and climbs to the designated route and then banked to skim low and fast over the group of dragonets that included gold Yttrith.

Too fast. Jugurth and the ground came together rather earlier than the bronze was expecting. There was a thump and a skid that left claw marks in the sand. T'yan felt a sudden flare of surprise and pain and indignation in his mind.

The youth raced to his bondmate's side. *I felt that! Are you hurt?*

The ground is hard, said Jugurth peevishly, as if he had never considered this fact before. ***It hurt my feet***. The bronze lifted up his offside foreleg and looked at it forlornly.

T'yan looked around frantically for the Weyrlingsecond. Jallori had already responded to the ungainly descent and was jogging towards the bronze.

"Nusrath says he's more surprised than hurt," she said as she got within speaking distance. "Broken a claw tip or two maybe, and given himself a bit of a bump during that landing. Though perhaps landing was too generous a term, eh? What did I warn everyone about paying attention?"

T'yan mumbled that they'd try to do better, and Jugurth looked contrite. ***Will landing on the ground always be like this?*** the bronze asked his rider plaintively, as he responded to Jallori's request to show her the claws and soles of each foot in turn.

Not if you look where you're going, said T'yan firmly. His classmates were going to tease him mercilessly about this, he was sure.

The tough hide of Jugurth's forefeet was scuffed, but not torn through. No claws had suffered any damage, but the bronze winced when he threw his weight onto his forelegs to lift up a hind foot for Jallori to inspect. ***My shoulder hurts when I do that***.

"Mmm." Jallori ran a hand over the muscle. "I think you may have wrenched it a bit. Dragonhealer Kryisia will be here in a moment to look him over."

On arrival, Kryisia quickly put her dragonhealer skills to use and her verdict was a day or two of rest, with no

unnecessary exercise and definitely no flying. T'yan tried not to sound too disappointed when he acknowledged the treatment and accepted a salve to rub into Jugurth's shoulder at regular intervals. The bronze himself expressed no such emotion. ***I do not think I like flying***, he said.

You're a dragon. Of course you like flying! T'yan spluttered indignantly at the thought.

I do not like walking either, Jugurth complained as he limped back to the Weyrling barracks. ***Will we learn to go between soon?***

I do not need to fly. I can walk. Jugurth raised his head, but otherwise stayed firmly put on his couch. ***Walking is much nicer than flying. It does not hurt my feet***.

T'yan stared at his bondmate in a mixture of exasperation and worry. Whoever heard of a dragon that didn't want to fly? Or rather, a dragon that didn't want to land?

That was the problem. Not Jugurth's take-offs, which -- when he could be persuaded to try them -- were fast and almost effortless. Not his glides, nor his powered flight when he was aloft. No, the problem was getting down again. Jugurth flew well, but he flew with half his attention directed towards the ground -- waiting suspiciously for it to leap up and slap him again.

Landing, the bronze had convinced himself, was painful and unpleasant. When the time came to alight, things just went horribly awry. Jugurth was tensing up, Weyrlingsecond Jallori had told T'yan. He was anticipating a crash, and thus precipitated one by seizing up just before touchdown. The skill of a soft landing, the Weyrlingsecond had said to them both, would come with practice.

But now Jugurth didn't *want* to practice, and T'yan was rapidly running out of ways to coerce or persuade him otherwise. *But... you're a dragon, Jugurth! Dragons fly.*

People walk places. Herdbeasts walk places. I will walk too, said Jugurth. ***We walked everywhere before. We can keep on walking together***. The bronze sounded pleased at his own reasoning.

People and herdbeasts walk because they don't have wings, pointed out T'yan. How in Faranth's name could a dragon that wouldn't fly earn his keep? Go out with the groundcrews? Help in the fields? He had horrible images of his handsome Jugurth acting as an overgrown sheepdog or pulling a huge cart. *I'm supposed to be a dragonrider*, the youth said forcefully. *How can I be a dragonrider if my dragon won't fly?*

You can ride, offered Jugurth. ***You can ride on me when I walk***.

T'yan threw up his hands in despair. *Ride you like a runner? Do you want people to think you're no better than a smelly runnerbeast? Or a... a...* He floundered, and

clenched his fists, trying to think of a comparison that might prick Jugurth into action. *Or a watchwher!*

The bronze gave a discontented huff, and folded his wings tighter against his body. *I like walking*, he said stubbornly.



“Faydra, I need to talk to you.” T’yan crashed into a seat beside Faydra in the Weyrhall, causing her bowl of soup to slop about and some to spill on the table. He banged his own bowl down with equally messy results.

“Hey!” she scowled at him. “Watch what you’re doing!”

“Hah!” said K’zuan with a grin. “Looks like T’yan can’t do landings either!” A few of the other weyrlings in Jallori’s class sniggered.

T’yan’s glare at the brownrider could have killed Thread at fifty paces. With a visible effort he turned back to Faydra. “Sorry,” he mumbled in what – for T’yan – was a pretty gracious apology. “Can I talk to you after you’re done with supper? Outside somewhere. Away from—“ He made a disparaging wave at their classmates. “—that lot.”

Faydra cast an inscrutable look at the others, and then back to him. “Okay. Get me some more soup, and you’re on.”

“You can have mine.” T’yan shoved the bowl across the table towards her and got up. “I’ll see you in a bit, then.”

As he left the hall, he heard G’rian’s voice behind him. “Hey, something must *really* be wrong if T’yan is missing a meal!”



A short time later, Faydra emerged from the Weyrhall with brownrider Ryuri. Without pausing to greet either of them, T’yan launched straight into his request: “Jugurth says he doesn’t like flying and doesn’t want to do it any more. Yttrith’s a gold, and Jugurth likes showing off for her. Can’t she *order* him to want to fly?”

Faydra looked surprised. “She can order him to take off. That’s not the problem, though. She can’t order him to *want* to fly. You can’t force anyone to like things they don’t like.”

“Otherwise redroots and fingerroots would be loved by children everywhere,” put in Ryuri on a cheery but practical note.

“But she’s a gold!” All dragons – even bronzes – would obey a gold’s command. They had been told so in their lessons, both before and after they Impressed. And the lesson had been indelibly branded into their consciousness by the behaviour of Ihanyith on the hatching grounds the day Incane had died. So Yttrith was bound to be able to help him.

“Yes, I had noticed she’s a gold!” Faydra replied with a sudden lash of sarcasm. “She can order until she’s blue in

the face, but that won’t make him like anything. Didn’t Jallori say that he’d get over this sulk by tomorrow, anyway?” Ryuri was nodding at this sentiment.

“I suppose,” muttered T’yan. Jugurth had shown no signs so far of relenting in his stubborn insistence that he didn’t like flying.

“Yttrith can tell him that a bronze that won’t fly is a waste of wings and no gold would ever consort with one,” Faydra said. “After that, it’s up to you and him.”



“What am I going to *do*?” T’yan burst into the weyrcot and yelled out his despair and angry dismay to Jallori as the Weyrlingsecond was sorting through the drill schedules she needed to assign today. “He says he doesn’t want to fly. He says he wants to *walk* everywhere! He won’t even listen to Yttrith!”

“Now, T’yan—” Jallori rose, firmly took the youth by the shoulders and sat him down in the nearest chair. “--Sit. Take a deep breath. Then perhaps you could tell me why you felt the need to charge into my cot without knocking, hmm?”

She deftly shut the door with a push from her foot, to close off the view from any prying eyes, and pulled a second chair across, so she could sit beside him. T’yan was headstrong and stubborn, but not usually prone to teenage angst or hysteria. Jallori suspected that he would not take very well to being ‘mothered’, so instead she offered the boy a mugful of redfruit juice from the pitcher on her desk, and waited patiently whilst he composed himself.

The teenager gulped a mouthful of the juice and then clung onto the cup with a white-knuckled grip that did not bode well for the vessel’s safety. “Jugurth says he won’t leave the Weyrling Barracks,” he said. “He says he doesn’t *want* to fly, so he doesn’t *need* to exercise or practise!” T’yan gave what sounded suspiciously like a snuffle and buried his nose in the mug again.

Nusrath? Jallori queried, knowing that the brown would have been alerted by T’yan’s precipitous arrival at their weyrcot.

Jugurth says he does not want to fly. He says that walking is better than flying. Nusrath sounded more than a little surprised at this.

“I’ve begged and begged,” continued T’yan in a voice that threatened to become a yell. “But he just won’t!”

‘Begged’ more than likely also encompassed roaring and shouting and storming out in a temper, knowing T’yan. Jallori suppressed a sigh. Jugurth could be stubborn but had never dug his heels in to this extreme on other topics. She suspected that the problem here was that the young dragon and rider were feeding off each other’s anxieties, making the whole situation worse and worse. Jugurth needed something to boost his confidence; T’yan needed something to calm him down. The glimmerings of a plan began to form...

Nusrath, could you ask Yoseth to pass on a message to D’zan, please? She quickly outlined her plan via Nusrath

and then turned her attention back to T'yan, giving a reassuring smile. "We need to tackle this in stages, T'yan."

"Let him practise, let him build up confidence..." the boy mumbled despondently, repeating the litany that she and Kryisia had given him for the past few days.

"No, I think we'll try something different," she said. "If Jugurth wants to walk, we'll let him walk." Jallori leaned forward to pick up her list of chores from the table top.

T'yan looked aghast. "But--" he spluttered. "You can't-- He can't--"

The Weyrlingsecond held up an admonishing finger and gave him a steely look for interrupting, and the boy's protest petered out. "Do you remember your lessons about dragon memory?"

The teenager nodded slowly, brow furrowed in incomprehension. "Dragons have got short memories. They don't remember things too well after a few days." T'yan looked up at her in sudden hope. "Jugurth'll forget that he doesn't like flying?"

Jallori wished it was that simple. "Not quite," she said. "But we can help things along a little. Tell Jugurth that he doesn't have to fly ever again, so you and he are excused from flight practise and wing exercises. But—" And here she smiled gently to take the sting out of the words. "—The pair of you will have to do other duties instead. Today and tomorrow, Weyrlingmaster D'zan just happens to have need of a messenger to deliver important letters to various people about the Weyr." She picked up a charcoal stick and crossed off the real duties she had planned to assign to T'yan.

"Messenger? Me?" the youth said doubtfully.

"You *and* Jugurth."

She saw comprehension dawn in T'yan's face, and the youngest smiled up at his Weyrlingsecond. "*Lots* of letters," he said. "All over the Weyr!"

Jallori nodded. She'd check with the dragonhealers about what level of exercise would be appropriate for what she had in mind. She wanted Jugurth to realise that dragons were not built for sustained walking, but did not want to injure the young bronze through exhaustion or muscle strain. "Now, you go and break the news to Jugurth, and report to D'zan after lunch. He and I have some urgent messages to scribe!"



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Why can Yoseth not bespeak one of the dragons who are nearby? asked Jugurth as he padded along the road in T'yan's wake. ***Their riders could pass on the message.***

The Weyrlingmaster doesn't want people gossiping about his business all over the Weyr, T'yan said primly.

He could send a firelizard, the bronze said hopefully.

Flitters are too scatter-brained. D'zan said that this message was important, he told his bondmate, pleased that the Weyrlingmaster had thought to provide him with a series

of plausible excuses for the need to walk to the Weyrharper's office with one of his notes.

Halfway through their second day as 'message dragon and rider', Jugurth – as Jallori had foreseen -- was becoming rapidly disillusioned with walking everywhere. His pace was becoming slower and slower, and he would occasionally look up mournfully as a dragon or firelizard soared overhead. His initial enthusiasm for getting out and about to meet other dragons and to be seen to be a useful message bearer was wearing thin. The bronze was continuing the task with an air that was resigned but dutiful, rather than eager.

T'yan, on the other hand, was almost starting to enjoy himself. Jugurth didn't walk very fast even when fresh, and Journeywoman Kryisia had given strict instructions to let his dragon rest when necessary. These instructions, the young bronzerider suspected, were echoed in D'zan's 'important letters', because every recipient asked him to wait while they wrote a reply. The replies always seemed to take about half an hour to compose, and there were always coincidentally a couple of journeymen or dragonriders nearby who would chat to them or offer Jugurth a drink of water whilst they waited. So T'yan was finding the exercise less than onerous, and definitely dragonlengths better than dockside scut work or stuffy old literacy classes!

At first T'yan had been nervous that those they met would sneer at Jugurth as a dragon that didn't want to fly, or snipe at him as some of his classmates had done. But no-one mentioned it... as if it were something inconsequential. What more than a fair few of them *did* do, however, was casually chat about the fascinating Holds they had been born in, or the magnificent sights they had seen, or the wonderful places that existed within Kadanzer territory itself. Had, for instance, T'yan ever seen the cataracts that gave Silverfall River its name? Oh, he really ought to – they made a noise like a roaring dragon and there were deep, dark pools downstream to swim in. Had Jugurth ever eaten wild wherry from Ista Island? They were delightfully succulent, but just wouldn't breed anywhere except their home isle.

No-one mentioned flying, or going *between*. But the journeyman Tanner he spoke to did talk at length about how long the sea voyage to Ista was; and the Smiths were a vast store of information on how long it would take to get by road to Silverfall River or Barrier Hold or any of the other places they mentioned.

The world is a very big place, commented Jugurth, after listening to this.

Yes, T'yan had said, *I suppose it is.* He added no remark beyond that. 'I told you so' would likely just make Jugurth more stubborn.

Still, this message business... if it were real messages and he got to go real places, instead of just running about the Weyr, then T'yan reckoned that he could quite like it. It would be fun, going from Hold to Hall to Weyr, delivering things and passing on important information. Not as heroic and dashing as fighting Thread, but still a grand thing for a former dockside drudge to do.

I think I like being a messenger, he informed his weyrmate. He nodded to one of the Smiths he had chatted to yesterday, and paused a moment to let Jugurth catch up before turning the corner that led to the Harpers' row of buildings.

My legs are sore, said Jugurth.

"Don't worry, we're almost there. You can have a rest while we wait for Master Andrian's reply."

The bronze gave a disgruntled rumble in response. He rustled his wings irritably at a trio of firelizards that came to investigate the bizarre sight of a Weyrling pair plodding down a dusty path.

On arrival at the Weyrharper's offices, Jugurth sank down gratefully onto the verge and closed his eyes. T'yan knocked and received a call to enter from Master Andrian, to whom he solemnly handed D'zan's latest note. The Harper smiled at him and made a brief show of reading it, then glanced out the window to where the little bronze lay. "I'll take a little while to gather what D'zan needs. Why don't you and Jugurth find a shady spot to rest? I'll send out some of the apprentices to share their lunch. I could do with a bite myself."

"Aye, sir." T'yan gave a nervous smile back and then darted back out to join Jugurth.

The bronze opened a weary eye. **Do we have to go back now?**

Not yet. T'yan sat on the grass beside his dragon. *We'll have to wait whilst Master Andrian sorts something out. I think he's having his lunch now.*

His answer was a snore.

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T'yan wiped an oily hand across his cheek, then grimaced. Synde flashed a quick grin of equally grimy sympathy. There had been a communal bathing session for the dragonets, and now the Weyrlings were engaged in oiling their charges. The bigger they grew, the messier it seemed to get.

Jugurth was already starting his habitual preening by arching his neck at Yttrith, carefully sidling round to show off his oiled flank to the queen. T'yan gave the bronze a swat with his oiling paddle and muttered an irritable command to stand still.

Do we have to deliver any messages today? Jugurth asked plaintively as his rider rubbed another paddleful of oil vigorously into his hide.

I dunno, said T'yan. *Why don't you ask Nusrath?*

Jugurth paused a moment and then turned his head to his weyrmate in resignation. **He says we may. His rider or Yoseth's rider will tell us soon.**

"Hmm-mm," mumbled T'yan absently.

Why don't the others deliver messages? asked the bronze. He obligingly moved a wing so that T'yan could oil the underside.

I 'spect they're too busy. Flight training and stuff. We don't have to bother with all that. T'yan tried to keep his tone nonchalant. *Faydra is stuck with all sorts of extra classes 'cause she's a goldrider. I'm lucky I'm not a girl, eh?"*

Jugurth glanced up wistfully as Nusrath sailed gracefully overhead. **Maybe we could do some flight training too?**



Now that it was almost time to take off, Jugurth felt less sure of his decision. Walking had been tiring and dull, but he had vague recollections that flying was also unpleasant. He shifted from foot to foot nervously.

And why were they here? Usually the Weyrlings did their flight training elsewhere, not here at the Weyrling bathing pier. Also, it was just them today -- the others were off somewhere else. **Aren't we going to the drill grounds with the others?** he asked T'yan.

Not today, came the reply. *Jallori wants us to try something new. You just watch Nusrath and copy him.*

Jugurth felt his weyrmate give him a reassuring pat on the neck. He gave T'yan a sideways glance as he moved away, then obediently turned his head to watch Nusrath.

The brown stretched his wings up and then back with a couple of vigorous flaps, requesting that the bronze do the same. Jugurth complied happily enough. This was easy -- exercises were no problem. Although his wing muscles did feel a bit stiff....

Are you ready to take off? Nusrath asked.

Yes... said Jugurth uncertainly. The brown sprang aloft, and after a few seconds hesitation, the bronze followed his lead.

Being in the air felt... nice. No, better than nice. Exhilarating. He flapped happily after Nusrath as he circled over the water. Maybe flying wasn't so bad after all.

I will circle once more, then land. Watch what I do, said Nusrath.

The young bronze felt a quiver of nervousness again. Jugurth remembered now. Landing -- that was the bad thing about flying. He watched as Nusrath circled, and then backwinged to a halt and settled lightly into the sea half a dragonlength off the bathing pier.

Land in the water? Jugurth asked in a doubtful tone.

Land in the water, Nusrath confirmed. **It is not cold.**

Cold was not what the bronze was worried about. He glided closer to the water's surface, then backwinged, stretching his feet out tentatively. Surely he must be almost down by now? He slowed his flapping, and dropped the last few feet, landing with a splash. Nusrath snorted as he was sprayed with water.

Are you all right? came T'yan's anxious query.

Jugurth stood up to his shoulders in water. **I am fine.** Landing wasn't so bad after all. In fact, the splashing bit had been quite fun. Though perhaps he should stay a bit

further away from Nusrath next time; the brown didn't look quite as amused about it.

We will try again, said the brown. *And this time do not stop flapping until your hind feet are in the sea. You need to practise control.* He took off, his great wings sending water flying everywhere.



“He’s doing well.” Weyrlingsecond Jallori nodded to where Jugurth was attempting his fifth watery landing.

The bronze seemed to be enjoying himself, controlling his descent better and continuing to generate some lift until both hind and forefeet had contacted the water. He was broadcasting excited thoughts to his rider and a running commentary on what Nusrath had told him to do and what happened as a result.

T'yan was ecstatic. Jallori's idea to repeat early lessons and get Jugurth to land in the water was a marvellous one, and he never would have thought of it in a thousand Turns. “We *will* be a real dragon and rider, after all!”

“Of course you will,” the Weyrlingsecond replied in a totally matter-of-fact tone. Her expression held no doubt at all on the topic.

T'yan beamed back at her. Jallori might be a hard taskmaster at times, but she was alright.



Jugurth stared suspiciously at the water underfoot. It had not gone ‘splash’; it had gone ‘squidge’. Surely that wasn't right? He picked up a foot and watched as water seeped in to fill the muddy footprint left behind. The sea only seemed to be a few fingerwidths deep here.

T'yan splashed through the shallows to hug him. *You landed on the ground*, he said.

Yes, Jugurth agreed with surprise. Sort of squidgy ground, but undeniably harder than water. If he picked his landing spots carefully, perhaps flying *was* better than walking. It was certainly a lot more fun!



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