
Cracking Rocks

by Ron Swartzendruber

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"All right, listen up!" Z'hon barked. "We've got a softshell in the ranks this morning. They tell us we're supposed to take it easy on him."

Anyara frowned, but stayed at attention without turning her head to look at the Oldtimer ex-Weyrleader at the end of the line. She heard wingmates grumbling on either side of her. Without turning her head, she muttered to Veska, "Why'd they put him in with us if he needs coddling?"

"I sure hope somebody warned him," Veska whispered, "Or he's in for a rude shock!"

Z'hon stalked down the line. Anyara stared rigidly ahead, knowing her wingmates were doing the same. Having a softshell in the ranks always made everybody else stand up straighter to intimidate them. But once the wingleader passed her, she let a grin form, and turned her head just far enough to see what was about to happen. This was going to be interesting.

When Z'hon got to the end of the line, he turned squarely to face the Oldtimer. "So, softshell, I hear you're the son of some Lord Holder up north, and you used to be a Weyrleader."

J'hanos snorted softly, his gaze fixed ahead. "You heard right."

"And you think that makes you better than me, softshell?"

Anyara could hear J'hanos sigh from halfway down the line. "Sir, no sir," he said, with a singular lack of enthusiasm.

"Sounds like somebody told him what to say, anyway," Anyara whispered, too quietly for either the Oldtimer or the wingleader to hear.

"I can't hear you!" Z'hon barked.

"Sir, no sir," J'hanos said more loudly, but his words still carried more irritation than respect.

"But I don't think he listened well enough," Veska murmured back. "That attitude is just going to make Z'hon push harder."

"Still think you're a Weyrleader and a lordling, softshell?" Z'hon growled. "You need to learn to follow again. Now, I'm going to give you an order and you're going to obey it. When I say 'Go', you will yell 'Sir! Yes sir!' as loud as you can. Think you can handle that, or is it too complicated?"

J'hanos set his jaw, saying nothing, and Z'hon chuckled. "Now, go!"

"SIR YES SIR!" J'hanos roared. But somehow he still made it sound like he was just going through the motions.

"That's a start," Z'hon said. "But how about you say it like you've got balls. Or did losing your Weyr make you lose those too?"

The Oldtimer's fists clenched at his sides and his eyes narrowed as he looked down at the shorter man. "SIR! NO, SIR!" This time J'hanos sounded a little more like he meant it.

"That's more like it! Now, I need to see how fit you are. The healers tell me you aren't supposed to do anything too hard yet. Think you can manage twenty push-ups?"

"I beg your pardon?" From the corner of her eye, Anyara could see J'hanos's incredulous stare.

Z'hon laughed nastily. "What, didn't they have exercises where you came from? Do you know what a push-up is, softshell?"

"Sir, yes sir." J'hanos was back to sounding irritated.

"Lost your balls again, I see. Down on your belly, softshell!"

J'hanos paused a moment, then shook his head. "No."

"And why not?" Z'hon said, a dangerous tone creeping into his voice.

"Because if ritual humiliation is your idea of how to run a fighting Wing, then you have rather more things to worry about than the location of *my* balls, *sir*."

"You're not a Weyrleader anymore, so don't tell me how to run my Wing!" Z'hon leaned into J'hanos's face as best he could, given the height difference between them. "Do you think you could do run my Wing better than me?"

J'hanos's voice was icy. "I have been a wingleader for--"

"I don't care how long you were a wingleader! That was four hundred Turns ago!"

"Not for me."

"You make me sick!" Z'hon yelled, his face a fingerlength from the Oldtimer's. "It was you people told us there'd be no more Thread. Because of you, we had to learn everything all over again from old records and game formations! You think you're the only one who lost friends? All the Weyrs had casualty lists longer than my prong, but we learned! We figured it out ourselves!"

Z'hon's face was going purple and the cords on his neck stood out as he roared, "And now you have the nerve to come here and tell me how to run my Wing! You think you know best, but the sooner I break you of that stupidity, the better for us all. You will learn our ways, and if that means doing things you don't like, you will do them with a 'sir, yes sir' or you will regret it! Now get down on your shuffling belly and give me twenty!"

J'hanos gazed at him levelly. "No. Sir."

Z'hon sneered. "A hard case, eh? Maybe a sevenday in the middens will change your mind. Step forward two paces."

After a moment, the Oldtimer complied, and Z'hon went on, "Now, since you think you're such a fine wingleader, why don't you tell me what formation shift you would order if you were commanding the middle Wing in a moderate rainstorm and the wind shifted from side to rear?"

From somewhere to her right, Anyara heard Sarais mutter something and B'rmig start to answer, but even if she could have heard the words they would have been cut off by J'hanos's response.

"Sir, in my time I would have reoriented the formation

to match the wind angle, and ordered every other rider to rise slightly in altitude, to allow for increased sideways maneuvering room without spreading the Wing. But I don't know if you use tactics as advanced as height-staggered formations, since, as you say, you had to work everything out for yourselves."

"What a wise-ass answer. I can see I'll have a long and enjoyable time breaking you of that attitude. But at least you admit you don't know the tactics we use?"

"I don't know them yet, sir." Anyara thought his tone grudging indeed.

"Then you have no business telling me how to run my Wing," Z'hon said dismissively. "Get back in line, softshell." He turned his back on J'hanos and strode to the middle of the line. "All right, children, time for exercises. The softshell can stay standing, since he's still weak. Let's show him the toughness of a proper Wing!"

As the line dropped to their bellies in unison, Anyara wondered why in the world this stiff-necked Oldtimer had been dropped into their Wing. Whatever the reason, he was in for a hard landing.



2859.03.07

"...eighteen, nineteen, twenty!" Anyara shouted along with the others on her team.

"Everybody pile off!" Br'mig ordered. "That's the rules, if the ball stops for a twenty count, the other team gets it!"

This was the first time Anyara had played holdball, though she'd heard her wingmates talking about it often enough. She'd been doubtful at first, especially since it was still the rainy season, but she had to admit it was fun even after their makeshift field by the gather barn had turned to mud.

As the pile of riders untangled themselves, Anyara saw that Y'heto still held the ball, but Anyara's squat, muscular teammate Q'tel held on to him. Y'heto slapped the ball down in frustration, but backed off willingly enough. Once everybody was ten paces away, Q'tel picked up the oblong leather ball and the game was on again. The bluerider tossed it to M'gin, who had dashed out from behind former wingsecond Q'wen just in time. Anyara sprinted for the goal, dodging around T'noh and almost running into D'nin.

Suddenly the ball was flying over her head; she leaped and dove, but only caught a face full of mud. Before D'nin could get the ball, Anyara scrambled after it and swatted it over to Diona who was coming from the other direction. It was too low for the other greenrider to catch, but she managed to kick it instead, lofting the ball high over Y'heto's outstretched arms to land down near the goal. Z'hon himself was there, and Anyara groaned; this was the closest they'd gotten to a goal, but it looked like the other team was going to get it again.

Just then M'gin crashed into Z'hon from behind, knocking him aside, and Q'tel scooped up the ball and ran for the goal. Q'wen stood hugely in his path, but Q'tel bulled right at him. Both lost their footing, but the impact knocked them into the goal box and Q'tel still had the ball.

Anyara and Diona whooped; score one for their team!

Veska shouted, "Told you we could do it!" over her shoulder as the teams headed back to their goals.

Y'heto yelled back, "But it's still three to one!"

"That's what you get with bronze and brownriders against green and blue!" T'tin agreed, grinning and wiping mud off his arms.

"We're not afraid of you!" Anyara called back.

"Why'd you even take us on?" O'ris yelled.

M'gin laughed impudently. "Because when else do I get to hit my wingleader and live to tell about it?"

"Enough!" Z'hon roared. "Quit your yapping and send us the ball!"

"Sounds like someone didn't like getting flattened by a greenrider," Diona said mischievously to Anyara as their team lined up.

"He won't punish M'gin, though?" Anyara said. "I mean, he told us right off that it was a game and he expected to get hit!"

"Sure, but he still didn't like it!" Diona smirked. Then Br'mig held the ball in front of him, and dropped it into a sharp kick that lofted it all the way past the other goal. Everybody started running, and there was no more time to talk.

By the time the game was over, the green and blue team had scored another goal, but so had the bronze and brown team. It was raining again, but the air was still muggy.

"Time for a swim!" M'gin said. He was covered with mud; Z'hon had seemed to target him personally, but every time he knocked M'gin down, the wild-haired greenrider had jumped back up laughing.

The green and blue team headed down the cliff path, except for Q'tel who went with Z'hon's group. "We showed them!" crowed Veska.

"What are you talking about? They handed our asses to us!" X'tanis replied angrily, trying to scrub mud out of his hair.

"Because they thought they would shut us out completely," M'gin said. "But we had Q'tel, and Br'mig here who grew up playing this game--"

"You think all Cibolans grow up playing holdball?" Br'mig asked amusedly.

"Well, don't all your holds have teams and play each other at gathers, and all that?" Anyara asked.

"Sure, but you saw my family's little place when we went climbing there last Turn. Can't play holdball on a mountainside!"

"But you knew what you were doing, which is more than some could say," Diona put in as they reached the bottom of the path and headed out onto the wide beach. The warm rain still drizzled down, keeping the air from being too hot.

"True, I saw it played a lot, and played a little at gathers," Br'ig shrugged. "But lets not forget M'gin, who kept our fearless wingleader so distracted."

"That was pretty smart," admitted X'tanis.

"Smart?" laughed M'gin, wading into the gentle surf a bit ahead of the others. "I just wanted to take him down a peg!"

"Well, it worked," Diona laughed. "And we scored twice against all the bronze and brownboys in the Wing!"

"Not all," Br'mig reminded them, as he scrubbed at his trouser legs. "M'qua didn't play."

"Did you expect him to?" Veska snorted. "He's got too much of a stick up his butt."

"Hey, he's all right," Anyara said. "He makes a good wingsecond." As she ducked down to wash her face, green Ezra and brown Tory popped in above her, chattering.

"What, are you sweet on him?" Veska teased, kicking water at Anyara and making her lurch back up straight.

"Hardly," she muttered, trying to calm the startled firelizards. "I'm just glad when L'ars forced Z'hon to promote T'noh, O'ris got demoted instead of M'qua."

"O'ris and T'noh as wingseconds together would have been a bit much," Diona agreed, leaning back to wash out her wavy black hair.

"What, the two most humble men in the Wing?" M'gin snorted loudly. "Nothing could *possibly* go wrong if they were both wingseconds. I'm *sure* they would have done a perfect job, especially all the boring parts of it."

"I still would rather have Q'wen back than T'noh," grumbled Veska.

"That was before my time, and anyway, he's a brownrider too. You know the Weyrleader's new rule," Anyara reminded her.

"Just you wait," X'tanis muttered sourly from off to the side. "Z'hon will find a way to get O'ris back in."

"Hah!" Veska scoffed. "That boy should never have been a wingsecond in the first place. Z'hon likes him, but he's too young."

"T'noh is hardly any older," Br'mig reminded her.

"But he's got a full Turn more of fighting experience," Anyara said, then was distracted by movement on the edge of the cliff. "Oh, and he's coming down to join us. Good, we can plan the next climbing trip."

"Maybe we'd better hold off on that," Br'mig said. "Things aren't normal right now, let's not do anything risky."

"What, because of J'hanos?" X'tanis asked. "Why do we have to care what that stuck-up Oldtimer lordling thinks?"

"Not what *he* thinks," Br'mig said bluntly. "What the new Weyrleader thinks, who put him here for some crackskulled reason or other."

"He's been here for a sevenday," Diona said. "What do you think of him so far?"

"I think he's in the wrong Wing." Anyara grumbled, trying to wash mud out of one sleeve. She really wanted to go climbing; holdball was fun, but it wasn't enough.

T'noh had almost reached the water's edge, and looked like he was going to wade in with the rest of them, though he had managed to clean up the worst of the mud already.

Veska laughed, shaking her head rapidly and sending water flying from her hair. "If he'll just bend that lordly neck, he'll do all right."

"That's right!" M'gin cackled. "He needs to learn there's no lords here, only Z'hon!" He stripped off his shirt and started to swirl it under the water.

"I still think he doesn't belong," Anyara grumbled. "L'ars put him here, right? He probably wanted to mess things up for Z'hon."

"Looking for an excuse to demote him?" T'noh asked, coming up from behind.

"I doubt that," Br'mig said.

"Right, crazy as he is sometimes, he'd never do that," Diona agreed.

"Never?" Anyara said. "He hates Z'hon. Of course he wants an excuse."

Veska poked Anyara in the shoulder. "Hey, I'd expect that kind of whershit from T'noh and Y'heto and the rest of those asses, but not you, girl. You bucking to join the Z'honlings or something?"

"Wingrider!" T'noh barked at Veska. "Have some respect."

Veska turned to face T'noh and stood at attention. "Yes, sir, wingsecond," she said. "Just because the rest of the Weyr uses that name for Z'hon's friends, does not mean I have any excuse to. I'm sorry, sir; it won't happen again."

Though she'd said those words with a straight face and an apologetic tone, Anyara caught a hint of sarcasm in her old friend's manner. T'noh seemed to have missed it, though, because all he did was nod and say "See that it doesn't," before striking out to deeper water. Veska relaxed, grinning.

Diona scowled after him. "Not even a sevenday as a wingsecond and his head's swelled up already."

"Where have you been, woman?" M'gin chortled. "His head was always swelled!"

"It's bigger now. He's lording it over everybody, especially J'hanos. O'ris, Y'heto, D'nin, even T'tin... J'hanos is getting ridden too hard by all the Z'honlings." As she said that last word, she gave another sharp look at T'noh's back, but the wingsecond was too far away to hear.

Anyara snorted. "They're just giving J'hanos the same as every softshell gets. All he has to do is swallow his pride for a while and they'll leave off, but no! You talk about T'noh's swelled head, but J'hanos has the biggest one in the Wing."

"He's got the biggest dragon, too!" M'gin cackled. Veska laughed with him.

"And I'd wager that's part of why they're on him so hard," Diona insisted seriously. "He's competition. They aren't treating him like everybody else. Come on, back me up here, Br'mig, I know you see things straight."

The older rider shook his head slowly. "I don't know. They're giving it to him pretty hard, but he's not helping by being so stiff-necked about it. One thing I am sure of, he wasn't sent here on some secret mission to mess us up. I don't care what T'noh and O'ris say, and I wish you weren't so quick to agree with them, Anyara. If anything screws up our Wing, it'll be that sort of talk, not some proud Oldtimer who'll probably be stuck on punishment duty for the next six months."

Veska chimed in, "Right, girl, ease up a little."

Anyara rolled her eyes. "All right, I'll shut up. But if you don't believe he's trouble now, wait a few months." An unwelcome thought struck her. "Do we really need to stop climbing just because of him, though?"

"I think we ought to go as soon as we can," M'gin said. "Don't worry about bronzeboy, he'll be on Extra Duty every waking moment for a while. We can sneak away and he'll never know!"

Br'mig pursed his lips thoughtfully "I'm not so sure. Remember, we only get away with it because nobody really

looks too closely at us. When most StrongWinders leave the Weyr without saying what they're up to, it's usually to go wrestling or woods-running or something like that, and they just roll their eyes at us."

M'gin frowned, and Anyara clenched her teeth. Usually Br'mig was all for climbing; what was he being so cautious about now?

Diona was nodding, though. "I hear what you're saying. As soon as someone figures out that our little group is doing something riskier than the others, Z'hon'll have to lower the boom on us. If it gets out that he really knew about it all along, it's his ass, so he'll have to act all shocked and punish us like we've never been punished before. And no more climbing for Turns and Turns."

"That's never stopped us before!" Anyara spat. "Why get all softshelled now?"

"Because of J'hanos!" X'tanis said angrily. "The shaffing Weyrleaders and Pink-scarf will be watching this whole Wing like wherry-hawks!"

Once, hearing that name for R'mal would have made Anyara bristle. But she was used to it after four months in StrongWind; now she only cared that she wouldn't get to go climbing anytime soon. She ground her teeth. "Fine. Now I'm going to get a shower before T'noh swims back and propositions me again."

"Hah!" Veska laughed as Anyara turned to go. "Afraid you might accept?"

Anyara snorted, but gave no other answer as she waded back to shore. At least with her back to them, they couldn't see her blush. Without climbing, she'd need to find something else exciting to do, after all...



2859.04.20

"Oh, hello, Anyara," Nivwilya said with a smile as Anyara walked up to the older greenrider's porch. "Nice afternoon, isn't it?"

Anyara smiled back. "Nice to see the dry season finally coming on. I'm still not used to winter being the nice time of the Turn. Say, do you have time to give me a haircut before dinner?"

Nivwilya glanced at the position of the sun through the trees. "Sure, I think I have time. Let me get my things." She disappeared inside her cot, then quickly came back out with a chair and a small cloth-wrapped bundle. Anyara sat in the chair as Nivwilya asked, "Not as short as last time, I take it?"

Anyara sighed at that memory -- close to six months after her transfer, she still sometimes regretted the loss of her long hair -- but then shook her head. "Actually, go ahead and cut it that short again. Even a few fingerwidths feels long to me now."

"If you say so," Nivwilya said doubtfully as she busied herself putting a cloth around Anyara's shoulders.

Anyara made no reply, and soon Nivwilya began snipping away.

That was when greenrider Sarais stalked around the corner of Dinia's weycot and headed directly towards them. "I swear, this time I'm really transferring out!" she said,

stomping up the steps to Nivwilya's porch.

"Oh dear, what's happened this time?" Nivwilya asked, stepping around from behind Anyara.

"It's O'ris! He made me do pushups right in the middle of the Weyrhall!"

"Why?" Anyara asked curiously.

"Because he's an ass! He pinched my butt in front of everybody, and when I slapped him..."

"You slapped him? Oh my," Nivwilya said.

"Be glad he didn't give you worse!" Anyara burst out. "He's a wingsecond again, and you do *not* hit rankers in this Wing."

"What's this about hitting rankers?" Ismarra said, hurrying up the steps along with Br'mig. "Sarais, Hadriath told me you were upset, but not why."

Sarais turned to face her newly arrived friends. "I slapped that wher's ass O'ris. Yes, I know that's against Z'hon's rules, which is all some people seem to care about," she shot an angry look at Anyara, "but he shouldn't have pinched me!"

"So what happened?" Br'mig said calmly, leaning back against the porch rail.

"He made me do thirty pushups right there, and I'm on shaffing Extra Duty for a sevenday! I'm putting in for a transfer!"

Ismarra sighed. "I hope you change your mind. We need all the sane people we can get in this Wing."

"Sure, that's what you said last time, and the time before," Sarais muttered. "But Z'hon's still here. The crazy people are still in charge. I knew I should have left when he demoted M'qua just so he could get his precious O'ris back in rank again!"

Nivwilya set down her shears and put a soothing arm around Sarais's waist. "Well, we still hope you decide to stay. Z'hon won't be in charge forever, you know."

"What?" Anyara blurted. "How can you say that?"

"Oh, come on!" Sarais sneered. "Aren't you the one who keeps saying you have to live for the moment because you never know when Thread will get you?"

"Yes, but..." Anyara sputtered, but couldn't think of anything to say.

"Listen a bit," Br'mig said in a placating tone. "You've been flying for eight Turns, I know. And in FlameWind the whole time."

"Until I got sick of their boring asses," Anyara muttered, but Br'mig was already going on.

"So you've been under R'mal the whole time. None of us," and he gave Sarais a quelling look, "should be surprised that you see wingleaders as permanent."

"But that's not how it's been here!" Ismarra put in. "We've had, what, five in that time? Or was there another one I've forgotten about?"

Nivwilya counted on her fingers. "Five, including Z'hon, yes."

Over the Turns, Anyara had heard about leadership changes in other Wings, of course, but hadn't really paid attention; the changes in her love life had seemed a lot more important. She started to open her mouth, then a memory struck her. There had been that one time, Turns and Turns ago now, when R'mal had left to weyrmate with his old lover at Landing. That had been a shock, even though he

ended up back at Kadanzer so soon that a new wingleader hadn't even been chosen yet. She remembered the uncertainty of that time, and looked at the older riders in a new light.

Ismarra smiled at her. "You see now, don't you."

"Well, sort of," Anyara said defensively, "I can see you aren't used to wingleaders serving for long, but how do you know Z'hon won't be like R'mal?"

"Z'hon like R'mal? That's rich!" Sarais said sarcastically. "They're nothing alike."

Br'mig chuckled. "They're different all right. But I do see your point, Anyara. He's been our leader for longer than any of the ones before him except G'nan."

"Don't forget H'rem," Nivwilya said.

"Good point."

"No, wait," Ismarra said thoughtfully. "He has served longer than H'rem now, just barely; H'rem died just a bit before your birthingday, Br'mig, back in 2852."

"That's right, and A'dan replaced him, now I remember," Nivwilya said.

Sarais laughed evilly. "And a fine leader that one was. Left in a mortal huff when that blond boy K'din beat him out for Weyrleader."

"And J'van couldn't stand to work under K'din either," Ismarra snorted. "He lasted even less time than A'dan."

"But at least we got G'nan, then," said Nivwilya fondly. "He and Jallori were the ones who really held us together, and he deserved the job."

"Hey, I hate to interrupt this fascinating history lesson," Anyara said, "But could you finish cutting my hair? We have Threadfall tomorrow morning and I need to repair a strap before then." Well, there was more she wanted to do besides leatherwork, but she wasn't about to tell them about that. She hoped she wasn't blushing.

"Sorry, dear," Nivwilya stepped away from Sarais and picked up her shears again. "It's easy for the four of us to get distracted with reminiscing, since we're the only ones left who've been here the whole time."

"There's still G'nan and Jallori," Ismarra reminded her.

"I'll never forgive Z'hon for forcing Jallori out," Sarais snapped.

"She left of her own accord," Br'mig reminded her mildly.

"Because she knew what Z'hon was like!" Sarais shot back. "I wish she'd told me at the time so I could've gotten out too!"

"She never was exactly a fountain of words," Ismarra said, smiling slightly. But then her smile faded. "Now, G'nan's the one I miss. When Takarth lost his wing..." her voice trailed off in painful memory, and she looked down.

Br'mig slid over and put his arm around her shoulders. "We'll none of us forget that day."

Ismarra looked up again, grimacing. "So, Anyara, you see why we don't just take for granted that Z'hon will last."

"I can see that, yes," Anyara said, holding her head steady as Nivwilya moved around to her other side, still snipping away. "But I don't see why you all talk about him like he's such a bad leader."

"He's full of shit!" Sarais snapped. Br'mig gave her a sharp look, and she went on in a more tactful tone. "Sure, fine, I admit he knows what he's doing in the air, and I can't

say that about every wingleader we've had."

"Every wingleader is different," Ismarra said with a sigh. "Z'hon is just, well, let's say he's a lot more extreme than I'd wish."

"It works, though." Anyara said. "We don't have as many deaths as the other Wings."

"Hmm, I guess you're right," Ismarra said thoughtfully. "Eja late last Turn, Zila at the start of this one, and poor Listelle just now."

"First daylight 'Fall we had in a month," Sarais said, "I don't know what happened."

"She must've gotten careless or something," muttered Anyara.

"We don't know what happened," Nivwilya retorted..

"That's right," Br'mig added. "She was unconscious before the healers got her off Seath's back, so let's not judge her, all right?"

"I don't think she belonged in the Wing anyway," Anyara said.

"Who the shells are you to say that?" Sarais burst out.

"She was in the Wing a lot longer than you, Anyara," said Nivwilya in a disapproving tone that reminded Anyara of her mother back at Barrier.

Br'mig shook his head. "Look, Anyara, I know you've gotten a lot more sure of yourself since coming here, but there is such a thing as being too sure."

"Right, and just because you like the taste of what Z'hon dishes out, doesn't mean everybody else has to," Ismarra said flatly.

"Well, if you don't like it, why are you still here?" Anyara said. "There's no waiting list anymore, just transfer out!"

"Maybe I will!" Sarais said. "I should--"

Ismarra cut her off. "Or maybe we'll stick around because when Z'hon bites it someday, this Wing will need people who remember what it used to be like."

"Oh, that's right, I forgot," Anyara said sarcastically. "Dodging Thread since the start of the Pass makes you more important than all the people who've transferred in because they like what Z'hon is doing."

"Hold still," Nivwilya muttered, but Anyara didn't stop.

"So who, in your wisdom, have you planned for the next wingleader to be?" A thought hit her all of a sudden. "J'hanos?"

Ismarra looked at her levelly. "I wouldn't mind him, no." Sarais nodded enthusiastically.

Anyara stared at them incredulously. "You want an Oldtimer who's been on punishment duty the entire month and a half he's been in the Wing?"

"He's been there because Z'hon keeps putting him there, not because he deserves it!" Sarais snapped.

"And Z'hon puts him there for breaking the rules!" Anyara shot back.

"Only the stupid ones!"

Br'mig threw up his hands. "Will you two just quit spewing ash and gas?" he said sharply, his usual patience seeming exhausted at last. "It doesn't matter who wins the sharding argument. Z'hon sets the rules, and J'hanos obeys most of them. He's a good Threadfighter, and he's never caused us a problem in the air. If he wants to argue on the ground, that's not our problem."

What is the matter? Cydith said suddenly. *I was asleep in the sun. You are angry!*

Nivwilya came around to Anyara's front, blocking most of her view. "And if you make my shears slip, that's not my fault."

"I'll hold still," Anyara muttered. Sorry for waking you, dear heart, she thought to Cydith.

"And Sarais," Br'mig went on, "I'd be sorry to see you leave. I hope you'll reconsider."

"I hope so too," Ismarra said.

"Well..." Sarais said.

"And you've other friends who would want you to stay," Nivwilya said, carefully clipping above Anyara's forehead. "Like Tess and Diona."

"All right, all right! But O'ris better not pinch me again."

"I'll talk to T'noh about that," Br'mig sighed. "He'll listen to me, and Z'hon will listen to him."

Anyara felt her face heating at the mention of the wingsecond's name.

"Why Anyara, you're blushing!" Nivwilya said in a teasing tone.

"Oh, so you are sleeping with him!" Sarais said. "Sleeping with a wingsecond and you have the nerve to talk about the rules!"

"I am *not* sleeping with him," Anyara insisted. They probably wouldn't believe the denial, but also wouldn't blab outside the Wing.

"Whatever you say, dear," Nivwilya said blandly, stepping back to inspect her handiwork.

"But—" Sarais said.

"Oh, relax," Ismarra sighed. "You know a few of the rules are only there to please the higher-ups, and we can work around them if we're discreet." She looked significantly at Br'mig, presumably in reference to his rock-climbing.

"How about some dinner?" Br'mig suggested, changing the subject.

"Sounds like a good idea to me," Nivwilya said. "Anyara?"

Anyara ran her fingers through her shortened hair. "Seems even. Oh, you mean dinner; no thanks, I'll pass. My sweepride made me miss lunch so I already ate."

"Come to me for a touch-up if you want," Nivwilya said. "But I'm going to dinner now."

"Have fun mending your harness tonight," Ismarra grinned teasingly.

"Hey, I really am going to do that!" She tried to keep her mind from imagining what she would do *after* that chore, though.

"Sure," Sarais said, with a smirk that bordered on hostile.

"Hey," Br'mig said, "Play nice. I could tell some stories about you too, you know."

Sarais's mouth twitched. "All right. No hard feelings?"

Anyara felt like giving a hot response, but Br'mig's level stare stopped her.

"Sure. Time to let it go," Anyara said, hoping it sounded less grudging than it felt. She took a deep breath, held it, and let it out; that usually helped, but only a little, this time. "No need to hold it in and upset the dragons,

right?" She actually managed a grin.

"There's entirely too much being held in around here," Ismarra muttered. "Every dragon in this Wing must be confused."

"Except Ulairesh!" Sarais laughed. "Z'hon --" she started to say, but Nivwilya interrupted.

"Shush! You said no hard feelings." That made Sarais shut her mouth.

"Time for dinner," Br'mig said, and the four left.

Anyara felt her temper stewing on the way back to her weycot. Ezra and Tory came to land on her shoulders, cheeping uncertainly, eyes whirling purple with worry. "Oh, you two," she sighed, reaching up to stroke both of them at once. "I'm sorry for upsetting you." *You too, Cydith dear*, she thought, trying to send soothing calmness to all three of them.

The two firelizards settled down and thrummed contentedly as she kept petting them, but Cydith was not so easily convinced. *You are always angry, deep down.*

It's just been the last few days, she thought firmly, ignoring the fact that it was really a lot longer than that. *I felt better before, and I will again.*

I don't remember, Cydith said doubtfully. *Why did that argument make you afraid?*

I am not afraid!

You are angry at me!

Who else is there with you? Anyara asked, making herself project curiosity instead of anger. Nothing distracted her green so easily as talking about other dragons.

Renath is next to me, came the distinctly smug reply.

Maybe he'll win your next flight. Would you like that? she said as she walked up her steps.

I would like to lie in the sun and sleep.

Anyara did not reply, busy taking her flying straps down from their hook. Hopefully Renath would win Cydith's flight, but that was probably some time off. Anyara had come to like sleeping with T'noh in the last few sevendays. Out of bed, he was still annoying as often as not, but it wasn't for his conversation that Anyara liked having him around anyway.

She got out her leatherwork kit and began repairing stitches. This set of straps would need replacing soon, she figured. "Oh, shaffit!" she said aloud as she poked her finger. She still felt annoyed.

"Shaff what?" T'noh said, coming in without knocking.

Anyara turned to him and grinned. He was just what she needed to distract her from her bad mood. "Oh, nothing much, just got in an argument with Sarais."

T'noh frowned. "What about?"

"She was just whining, as usual." Anyara didn't want to talk about it; she didn't want to talk at all. She set down her leatherwork, stood up, and stretched, hoping the sight of her body would distract T'noh.

He wasn't distracted, though. "Was anybody else involved?"

Anyara shrugged. "Ismarra and Br'mig. Nivwilya was there too, but that was just because she was cutting my hair." T'noh hadn't noticed that, of course, but she hadn't expected him to. She crossed to him and tugged on his collar. "Come on, I don't need you to be my wingsecond right now."

Absently, T'noh fended her hand off. "Tell me about it," he ordered.

Anyara stiffened. In clipped tones, she reported the argument, starting with Sarais's complaint about O'ris and ending with the other riders' endorsement of J'hanos for wingleader. T'noh didn't need to hear about them teasing her for sleeping with him.

The wingsecond listened intently, frown deepening into a scowl when the Oldtimer's name came up. "Z'hon needs to hear about this," he said when she finished.

"What, right now?" Anyara protested, hearing his tone. "I want you here now. You can tell him later."

"No, now. You know how it has to be with us. If sleeping with you ever interferes with my duties as a wingsecond, Z'hon will have to take notice and that'll be the end of it."

Anyara bit the inside of her cheek. She just wanted to grab him and haul him into her bed, never mind his duty, or that little part of her that still insisted on being shocked at her wantonness-- but he obviously was not going to let himself be hauled. Anyara was afraid if she tried persuading him, it would just come out as a whine, and she was *not* going to beg. "All right, go, but don't come back tonight. I need my sleep before 'Fall tomorrow morning."

T'noh shrugged. "All right, see you tomorrow." He hurried out the door, leaving Anyara to her frustration.



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"All right, listen up!" Z'hon barked at the moons-lit line of riders. Anyara and the others stood to attention as their wingleader went on, shouting over the grating crunches of dragons chewing stone. "Good news and bad news, children. The good news is that the Rubicon sky is clear, with not much chop and both moons are nearly full. The bad news is we're not going to be able to take the handoff from Eastern Weyr over Rubicon Bay like usual for the Eastern-Rubicon 'Fall track. High-altitude winds have pushed the 'Fall south over the Black Rock River, so we'll be taking the handoff in live combat.

"Since we've two softshells in our midst," he paused to glare at M'mon and Sarafina, "I'll explain how that works. We're starting off at the top of our three-Wing stack, so we'll be first in. Their top Wing will rise up to make a gap in their stack. We insert, and they'll jump away. Then we rise to give their middle Wing room to open a gap for our middle Wing. And so on. Remember, we have to keep fighting the whole time, and we'll be doing it in the dark. But I've trained you for this, and I don't expect you to fail me. Now, inspection!"

Z'hon gave her a cursory glance as he walked down the line, and then Anyara could relax a bit. This inspection would focus on the softshells; it always did when they had new graduates. At least the moons were bright tonight, and over Rubicon they would already be high in the sky. And it would be a short 'Fall for them, Eastern Weyr having followed it for most of its length.

"Another night 'Fall, huh?" V'vam said from Anyara's right, beyond Sarais.

Anyara didn't bother to respond. The young greenrider was too soft for her taste; not for the first time she wondered what he was doing in StrongWind.

Sarais was more willing to make conversation. "I'm so tired of night 'Falls!"

"Me too," V'vam agreed. "I thought we wouldn't get any more for a while after that big spate we had for a couple months."

Sarais sighed. "That's just how it works out sometimes. But even after ten Turns I'm still not used to it."

"Will you two quiet down?" Anyara muttered. She hadn't stopped being annoyed at Sarais even a month after the argument on Nivwilya's porch, but normally she could at least keep her mouth shut. Just pre-combat jitters, she figured. Well, and general frustration; she hadn't gotten any climbing that month either, nor much of anything else to distract her from her dark moods. It wasn't just her, either; she'd heard other riders muttering, and Z'hon and the wingseconds were harsher than usual.

"Sorry," V'vam said earnestly.

Sarais wasn't so willing to apologize. "Relax, Anyara, it's just a short one tonight."

"Relaxing around Thread gets you killed!"

Sarais sighed. "But if you never relax, you don't have much of a life!"

Anyara clamped her teeth together because T'noh was coming down the line. He was in full wingsecond mode, so Anyara would get no mercy if he'd heard the exchange. All he did was nod as he took his place in line, directly to Anyara's left.

"I have plenty of life!" she thought to herself, staring straight ahead. I was sleepwalking until I joined this Wing, but now I'm awake, shaffit! Somehow her thoughts rang hollow, though, and she was glad when the call to mount up distracted her. She wanted action, wanted to feel her blood pumping; she looked forward to the coming fight.

But the fight started going wrong as soon as they came out of *between*. The windchop was worse than they'd been told and it was obviously even stronger higher up, where tattered clouds scudded across the faces of the moons. In the distance Anyara could see occasional spurts of flame as the Easterners fought the leading edge. Those flames were spread really wide, she thought. Each rider must be covering a lot of sky... but at least the Thread was also scattered wide, otherwise this would be an impossible situation.

We are to go with Renath and obey his rider's commands, Cydith relayed. That made sense to Anyara; with the line spread so far, there was no way a wingleader could tell what was going from end to end. Better to put the wingseconds in charge of sections and let them deal with weather shifts as they arose.

Renath's rider says we are to spread out so our riders can just see each other, and maintain that distance. That was a good rule of thumb, Anyara thought as she widened the gap between her and T'noh, just on her left. Sarais and Cbaoth receded on her other side; there was no way to see V'vam beyond her. Thread had not reached them yet, but when it did, they would be spread out to meet it. Already she could see the Eastern's top Wing rising up to make room for StrongWind to join the stack.

A cloud covered both moons for a few moments,

making her lose sight of T'noh and Sarais. Automatically she started moving left to get T'noh in sight again, as ordered; but then the cloud was gone and she straightened out again. Hopefully there wouldn't be any really big clouds, or the line could get really messed up.

Renath's rider says it is time to meet Thread! Cydith exulted.

Go! Anyara responded, urging her green forward. *Can you see the Thread yet?*

Only a few clumps. They are spread far apart.

Anyara was glad for draconic heat-sight, because she had no way to see Thread clumps until they came close... and then it might be too late to chase them. At least with the moonlight, she could see them just in time to duck, if she had to. Many nights didn't even allow that much leeway.

There! Cydith said, and rose to meet a clump. Anyara saw it a moment before it crisped in her green's fiery breath. *Ulaireth's rider says the other Weyr's dragons are leaving and we are to fly up to where they were.*

That would be the top Wing heading home to Eastern; now it was their turn to rise up so Eastern's middle Wing could follow and make room for the next Kadanzer Wing to take their place. Cydith fought for altitude, and the wind seemed to buffet her more with every wingbeat.

Then the moonlight faded all at once. Anyara looked up and saw only the faintest hint of light at the edge of a thick cloud. *Are there orders from Renath?* T'noh had only moments to order everyone to hold position, if that's what he wanted to do.

I would tell you if there were. Thread! She veered left after a clump, which was the direction they had to go anyway to maintain visual contact with T'noh. Sarais would be moving in as well; the whole line contracting. That would let Thread through, but she supposed that might be better than getting their line all fouled up in the dark; that might let just as much through.

More Thread! Cydith rose and charred a clump. The stuff really was sparse tonight; normally the top Wing had to struggle to get their share of the clumps that sleeted past.

Keep moving left until I say. She couldn't see T'noh. Wait, there he was; closer than she'd expected. The moons mostly stayed covered; was this a whole cloud front moving in? Why hadn't Eastern warned them? All they had were little gaps of moonlight now.

Vhauth's rider says we are too close together! We are to widen out the line! Cydith started to obey; the order came from a bronze, after all.

No, do not listen! Anyara ordered. *Obey Renath's rider!*

Thread! As Cydith swerved to take care of the clump Anyara couldn't see, she went on, *Cbaoth obeys Vhauth!*

"Sarais, you idiot!" she yelled in frustration. Even if the older rider could have heard her, it was already too late.

A patch of moonlight revealed Sarais moving out to open the line, starting to rise after a Thread clump... and also revealed V'vam, higher up but still moving in from the other side, diving after the same clump.

The darkness closed in again, but even through her flying helmet Anyara heard both dragons scream, and then the others begin to keen.

"You killed two of my people!" Z'hon shouted. As Anyara climbed down Cydith's neck, she saw the wingleader stalking ferociously towards Vhauth's great bulk. T'noh appeared from Cydith's other side, also heading in that direction.

J'hanos stepped out from his bronze's shadow and stood to attention, a rigid silhouette with the light of the setting moons behind him.

Z'hon's fury was so great that he ripped off his helmet and hurled it at J'hanos. The Oldtimer did not flinch as it bounced off his chest. Z'hon and T'noh reached him at the same time, and despite herself, Anyara drifted closer to listen. She thought she saw a few others as well, all keeping to the shadows.

"Shut up!" Z'hon spat at something J'hanos had said. "Wingsecond, make your report!"

"Sir!" T'noh said, snapping sharply to attention and speaking in a parade-ground voice. "As instructed I took my element of the Wing to the right flank, ordering them to maintain visual separation. Clouds appeared shortly after we reached our assigned position. I judged that the risk of confusion if the riders could not see each other outweighed the risk of shortening the line, especially as the handoff was in progress and there would be an extra Wing in the stack. Bronzerider J'hanos ordered the line to spread out, and as a result, greenrider Sarais began moving outward while Greenrider V'vam continued to move inward. They went after the same Thread clump and collided. Greenrider Sarais was killed instantly and Cbaoth suicided. Breeth's wing was broken. Greenrider V'vam was unconscious or otherwise unable to give coordinates for a return to the Weyr. They impacted somewhere on the Rubicon side of the Black Rock River. The Queens' Wing marked the spot. That is my report."

Anyara winced.

Z'hon turned to face J'hanos. "Explain yourself!"

"Sir!"

Four months of near-constant hazing had at least taught him to show some respect, Anyara thought. But then the Oldtimer's next words destroyed that illusion.

"Wingsecond T'noh did not properly account for the conditions, sir! Handoff is not the time to shorten the line. I reminded the wingsecond of that fact but he refused to acknowledge it. I asked him a second time to change his orders but he refused. The Wing below us was about to return to Eastern and leave FlameWind exposed beneath us. I could not sit idly by when your man's order risked the lives of--"

"So you countermanded a wingsecond's orders?" Z'hon said with a voice like mountain ice. "FlameWind lives were more important than those of your own wingmates? Is that it?"

J'hanos answered crisply, "Sir, it is clear that--"

"What's *clear* is that you still don't know your place!" Z'hon roared. "You don't give orders! Not ever! Two of my riders are dead because of your interference. Now I will give you an order and you will not argue it. First, you will spend tonight digging two graves. If you finish before morning, you are not to leave. If you have to sleep, you'll do it right there. Wingsecond T'noh will inspect your work at dawn. If he's not satisfied, you get to dig some more



until he is. Then you fill the holes back in and go down to the Feeding Grounds and ask Weyrherder Marshall for two sevendays of the worst punishment duty he can find. You will do this duty without complaint. You will also continue your regular punishment duties here; don't forget you still have a month of Extra Duty. Do I make myself clear, bronzerider?"

J'hanos had stood woodenly throughout the wingleader's diatribe. But instead of answering the question, he said, "Sir, I request transfer out of this madhouse you call a Wing!"

"Denied!" Z'hon snapped. "You'll not escape until I've gotten the full price of your incompetence out of your puffed-up hide! Wingsecond, see that he begins his punishment immediately." With that he turned away, but stopped after a single step and looked around. "All of you listening in the shadows, show's over! We've dead wingmates tonight. Move your sorry asses to the edge of the cliff for the memorial."

Anyara hastily stepped back to Cydith's side and undid the green's fighting straps. *Go to your wallow now, love. I'll be along later.*

I am sleepy, Cydith said.

Anyara silently agreed with her, hoping the memorial would be a short one. Neither Sarais nor V'vam had been terribly popular, but some people would still want to say something. They wouldn't expect *her* to take a turn holding the torch, she hoped.

She walked out across the field to the edge of the cliff where the Wing was gathering in a loose semicircle facing the moonlit sea. Someone was already standing in the middle with the torch. She should probably hurry, but she was tired. By the time she reached the circle and found Veska, she saw that the figure in the middle was O'ris, which figured because he'd always been the one to lead off in the three other StrongWind memorials since her transfer. He lit a second torch from the first one -- two riders were dead, after all -- and began to speak.

"Two wingmates died tonight. Now's the time to remember them. A couple of you haven't seen this before, so here's how it works. Anybody can take a turn with the torch and say their piece about the dead. The only rule is you tell the truth. The bad along with the good, and if there's more bad than good, so be it; we still honor the dead with the truth."

He paused, and there was a mutter from the circle. That was unusual, as far as Anyara could tell. O'ris went on, "V'vam was new to us. Less than a Turn out of training. He made his share of mistakes, but it wasn't his mistake that killed him. It was Sarais. She was a veteran, with us since the Poisoning. She was good enough in the air, but on the ground, she dragged her feet." More muttering broke out, but O'ris went on without pause. "She was often on the point of transferring out, but she never did. Maybe it would've been better if she had, because tonight she chose to obey the wrong order, and she killed herself and her wingmate. That's all I have to say."

Anyara nodded to herself. When Z'hon's right-hand man set a disapproving tone like this, most people would take the hint and shut up, or else just agree. Eja's memorial had started like this and been very short, and it was fine

with Anyara if this one was too because all she wanted to do was go to bed, preferably with T'noh.

But then Diona stalked out and snatched both torches from O'ris and held one out defiantly. "Sarais was my friend. She was a good rider, not a foot-dragger! She was here back when things were different than they are now. She didn't like all the extra discipline these last few Turns, but she did her duty and didn't run off to another Wing. She knew that things change, and even wingleaders don't last forever!" That last line brought a few gasps from the circle, and some angry mutters as well. Anyara wondered what Z'hon would do to Diona for saying that, but it wasn't Z'hon who responded.

Instead, young Y'heto strode out and took the torches away from Diona, curtly gesturing her back into the circle. "I didn't know V'vam very well. It took him a long time to get his tattoo, but he was all right anyway. Sarais wasn't, though. Oh, she pulled her weight most of the time, but she was always arguing and complaining. She didn't belong here and she should've left. She'd still be alive if she had."

Beside Anyara, Veska shifted her weight and muttered something, but Anyara couldn't make out the words. Other riders were grumbling too, as D'nin came out and said much the same thing as Y'heto had. Anyara didn't pay much attention to the words; she was too busy looking at Diona, on the other side of the circle sobbing into Ismarra's shoulder, with Br'mig resting a comforting arm on her back. Anyara was embarrassed for her friend; it wasn't like Diona to be weak. Maybe she'd been closer to Sarais than Anyara had realized.

T'noh stepped out of the shadows and took the torches from D'nin, and Anyara looked at him instead of Diona. He considered for a few moments, then spoke. "I didn't know V'vam that well until I was promoted. Then it was my job to know what was going on with everybody, so I drew him out. He was kind of soft for this Wing, but when he needed to, he could suck it up and be a man. He could've made something of himself with a little more time, but Sarais didn't give him that. V'vam obeyed my orders tonight, but Sarais obeyed the Oldtimer instead, and she killed V'vam with that stupidity," he finished bitterly.

Anyara nodded tiredly. Hopefully this would be done soon. The two wingseconds had spoken, and they were right, so why should anybody disagree? Soon enough Z'hon would step out to say his piece and then end things by hurling the torches off the cliff into the sea.

But then Br'mig and Ismarra came walking out at the same time, looking grim enough that T'noh actually backed up a step as they reached him. They each took a torch and held it up, and Br'mig's normally quiet voice rang out clearly. "This has always been our tradition. Even before the Poisoning, we'd get together and honor our dead with the truth. After the Poisoning, the three of us who were left stood up to tell the truth about our dead to the new riders, ones like Ismarra and Nivwilya. And Sarais. There weren't enough hands to hold all the torches, but Sarais was one who stood up and offered to help. She was young and naive then, but she told the truth right enough; that she'd never known any of our friends when they were alive, but from what we said about them, she could tell they'd been riders to reckon with, and she swore to honor their memory by

keeping the traditions." He paused, and in the torchlight the old pain on his face was clear as he bowed his head.

Ismarra went on, coldly, "We built the Wing again, both those of us who were new, and the survivors. True to the name, we were strong. We did our duty and didn't flinch even in the hard times. We lost wingmates, and held more torches, and honored our dead with the truth. Wingleaders came and went, and made their own rules, but we kept the traditions, and taught them to you all as you came to us. As long as you were willing to go beyond the call of duty, we brought you in and made you our own, even the ones who didn't remember the old times and thought all we were was just a tough Wing. Even when Z'hon came and changed things, we held on. We welcomed him as a strong leader for our strong Wing. We held on through the changes, even though there were fewer of us every Turn who remembered. This morning, there were four of us who were there. Now there are three. I honor the dead with the truth."

Br'mig raised his head and looked straight at Z'hon. "But we did not do all this just to stand silent and listen to Sarais being slandered. This is about remembering our dead, not twisting the truth to make a point about following orders. You're the wingleader and you can do what you want in the air and on the drill field, but there are some things you don't get to change. I--"

But he was drowned out by a ragged cheer. Diona and Tess came out to stand with Br'mig and Ismarra. "That's right!" Tess called out, unusually bold. "You don't own us!"

"Who's with us?" Diona shouted exultantly. "We'll be on Extra Duty for a Turn, but it'll be worth it! Come on out or we'll know you're just a follower. Who remembers what this Wing is really about?"

Anyara watched, open-mouthed. How dare they? Didn't they know what they were doing to Wing discipline?

Q'wen strode out. "I remember," he said in his deep voice. A step behind him came the normally aloof M'qua, dark face grimly set.

They had been wingseconds, Anyara thought. Didn't they know what this would do to morale?

"I held a torch that first night," Nivwilya said clearly as she walked out to join the group at the edge of the cliff. "I remember."

Beside Anyara, Veska stirred. "Not you too?" Anyara hissed. "Z'hon'll kill you! Why he hasn't he broken this up already I don't know."

"I was here even before Q'wen and M'qua," Veska growled back. "Those are my friends up there and they're going to catch Thread for this, and you think I should sit back because I'm afraid of a little punishment? I'm standing with my friends, and you can join me, or you can keep kissing Z'hon's ass."

"What?" Others were joining the torchlit group, but Anyara had eyes only for her friend.

"You heard me! You always were such a follower. You followed R'mal when you thought life was all nice, and now that you know it's dangerous, all you do is follow Z'hon instead. Stand up for yourself, girl!"

Anyara felt an almost physical wave of fear, then clamped it down. Through clenched teeth, she grated, "So I should follow you instead? No thanks! Go out there if you're going, but don't drag me into it!"

Veska sneered, spat at Anyara's feet, and strode out. "I remember!" she called out. "Punish me all you want, Z'hon, but this Wing is about more than your ego!"

M'gin's cackle rang out as he went over to stand next to Veska. "Shells, I wasn't there, and I don't remember, but if it's about standing with my friends and not licking bronze boots, I'm with you!"

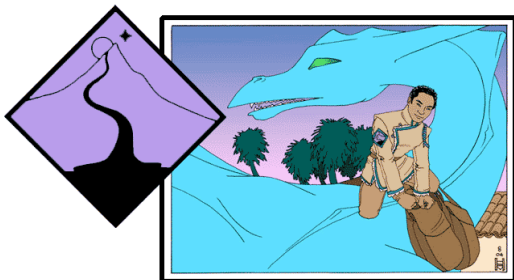
Br'mig and Ismarra were muttering back and forth in the back of their group; from the worried looks on their faces, they hadn't meant for things to go this far, but were caught in it now. They now had about a dozen in their group, but Z'hon had almost as many gathered around him; his wingseconds, and the bronzeriders, and people like X'tanis and H'bayn and A'kasen. Larger than either group, though, were the riders who had not joined either side.

Anyara could see T'noh looking at her from the edge of Z'hon's group. She knew she should support him, but Veska's words still stung. She wasn't about to go against Z'hon, but shaffit if she'd go against her friends either.

Br'mig pushed himself to the front of his group, but before he could say anything, Z'hon cut him off by striding out and demanding the torches. "If we're through choosing sides, can we finish the memorial?" he sneered.

He went back to his group and held up both torches. "Now I'm going to tell you the truth!" he shouted. "The truth is, the StrongWind you remember is dead! It was a good Wing, but if you tear apart the Wing of today trying to recreate what you had, you dishonor its memory! I honor the dead with *that* truth!" he said in obvious mockery of Br'mig and Ismarra.

Br'mig started to say something else, but Z'hon overrode him. "Now this memorial is over, and there will be no more like it! Go back to your cots, and anyone who shows up late for drill tomorrow morning will wish they'd never been born! This Wing is mine!" He grabbed both torches in one hand and hurled them high and long. The moons were below the treeline now, and it was dark. Anyara turned and left.



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