
Selection Pressure

by Smitty

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"I understand congratulations are in order," Lybelle said, looking up from the record ledger she was studying as L'ars entered her office. "The first open flight at Landing Weyr and a FireStorm bronze was the victor."

"Yes, well." The Weyrleader beamed, looking as proud as any father. "I think there *may* have been some luck involved at the end, but our N'dren's Jeth has finally hit his full growth. There'll be some serious celebrations going on just as soon as Uleka lets him out of that flight cot!"

Lybelle chuckled. "Any excuse..."

"Winning a gold flight is *always* cause for celebration." L'ars dropped onto the brightly-upholstered couch that sat across the room from his Weyrwoman's desk, stretching his arms out across the back as he made himself comfortable. "And having a Kadanzer bronze win an external flight will do a lot to settle those that've been complaining about being barred from chasing some of our juniors. Some of them might be more balls than brains, but even they can work out the odds."

"Good." Lybelle quirked a smile. "Because I think it's time that we considered Ihyanith's next rising."

L'ars frowned. "Ihyanith isn't due for months."

"Neither was Amiseth," Lybelle reminded him. She shook her head sadly and closed the ledger, resting her elbows on its thick leather cover. "We didn't consider Ihyanith's flights when we were calculating the bloodlines – she and I are Telgar-bred and there are no closely related bronzes at Kadanzer other than her weyrling sons. Genetically, her flights are the least complicated bar Orylath's, but politically... that's another matter."

"You didn't just call me in to offer congratulations, did you...?" L'ars sighed and sat up. "You're worried that G'tin might try to complete the set?"

"One way or another, he always seems to be at the heart of these discussions, doesn't he?" Lybelle chuckled. "The truth is that however strong a sire Fordath might be – and I'm well aware that he's of Phanth's get, and you can be justly proud of that – we've already seen what happens when a child is left in charge of a Weyr."

"He'll make a fine Weyrleader one day," L'ars allowed. "But he needs more experience behind him before that day comes."

"And *experience* is the key. It's why I was brought here, after all – to provide experienced support for Valenne when she found herself surrounded by juniors barely out of training and a Weyrleader young enough to be her son."

Lybelle frowned, remembering her transfer. "It was like walking into a crèche!"

L'ars snorted. "Wiping backsides not what you signed up for?"

"To put it mildly." Lybelle pushed herself to her feet, walking across to the window to gaze out at her dragon as she dozed in the sunlight. "Given the degree of inter-relationship within Kadanzer's breeding population, we needed to order the bloodlines first. That had the greatest immediate import, especially given Savukath's preferences. Now that we have them all used to the idea of flight restrictions, I want to apply similar restrictions to Ihyanith's flights as well."

"That... won't be popular."

"And the other restrictions *were*?"

"I know, but traditionally *all* of a Weyr's bronzes rise for a Senior." L'ars spread his hands. "That's the way it's been done for centuries – the strongest dragon wins."

"And that system works well in an Interval, when there'll be maybe fifteen bronzes of breeding age in the Weyr and no Thread to worry about. Or at Kadanzer, after the Poisoning, with just two weyrings and a pack of over-ranked transfers. But now, when we're at full fighting strength?" She turned towards him. "And besides, that tradition isn't so old."

"It's been in place since – ah." Lybelle saw realisation dawn in her Weyrleader's eyes. "You want to adopt Southern's approach?"

"Why not? From what I've heard from Dunia, Revanne and the others, it worked very well for them."

"Ranked bronzes only? Including wingleaders and wingseconds, that would only give Ihyanith a field of –" L'ars paused, doing the calculation in his head. "– nineteen potential mates at current count. Would she be happy with that?"

"If you asked her now? No. But in heat, she wouldn't care how many were there, so long as there were enough to give her a good run!" Lybelle shrugged. "The remainder would be herded out by the command of the other queens. Dunia certainly has experience of wrangling randy bronzes out of a Weyr after her time at Southern."

"You've got all this planned out, haven't you?"

"I've been... considering it for some time. Given Kadanzer's track record with sudden catastrophe, it seems only prudent to take precautions. But I wanted to ask your opinion, as the current incumbent."

L'ars laughed out loud. "As if it would affect me!" He paused a moment, then continued. "Speaking as the rider of a bronze, I'm torn between wanting a reduced pack of potential rivals and wanting to prove Phanth's superiority over as many others as possible. And yes, that's pure flight bravado there, but I know what it's like to be caught up in the rut!" He chuckled softly, shaking his head, then sobered. "Speaking as a *Weyrleader*, though... the Weyr deserves experienced leadership. And while the dragons deciding is tradition as old as time, I don't see why that decision shouldn't be made from a field restricted to those riders already considered proven leaders."

"We are taught as weyrings that our role is to guide and control our dragons, to keep them safe from their own raw instincts," Lybelle said, leaving the window and crossing

the room to lean back against her desk. "Golds and bronzes most of all. We keep them from gorging, we keep them from fighting... keeping them from choosing the untried is surely only an extension of that."

"And if only wingleaders and wingseconds are chasing the prize, then it *might* just make some of the young hotheads pay more attention to trying to behave and climb the rank ladder the recommended way." L'ars looked thoughtful. "Yes, this needs to be presented as a separate issue to the junior restrictions, but the more I think about it...."

"The more it *does* need to be presented." Lybelle smiled, satisfied. "I'll arrange a meeting with Dunia, to explain the situation, but after Southern it will hardly be new to her. And then we can pick the best time to break it to our bronzes – even if Ihyanith's cycle shifts in line with Amiseth's, we still have a month or two to settle things in."

"Wingleaders first," L'ars said decisively. "They'll have no cause for complaint and they can keep the disappointed in line."

Lybelle nodded. "That's reasonable."

"Then arrange a meeting for *all* our bronzeboys in one of the flighthalls, break it to them there. Let them get all the yelling out of the way before we announce it officially to the Weyr as a whole." L'ars chuckled. "I'd rather not spring it on them over dinner – there's *far* too much crockery in that Weyrhall...."

"Agreed." Lybelle drummed her fingers lightly against the edge of the desk, considering options. "Once the bronzes have been told, we can make it official... although I suspect that once the bronzes have been told, the rest of the Weyr will know in *very* short order." She frowned. "I don't see there being any complications other than a few bruised egos, however – most are already aware of the Southern system and there was enough upset caused by a young bronze catching Nicareth that I think the majority would be sympathetic to anything that prevented that situation coming to pass again."

L'ars shook his head sadly. "Poor G'tin."

"G'tin?" Lybelle snorted. "I was thinking more of some of Z'hon's wingmen. Or even some of your own – young N'dren *has* won a flight now, after all, and Bh'ruk can't be far behind...."

"Ouch."

"Quite." She smiled and quirked an eyebrow. "So, we're agreed? Kadanzer's Weyrleaders to be selected from those who already hold rank."

"Make them earn the cords before they wear them."

L'ars pushed himself to his feet. "And save you from having to wipe their noses after the flight!"

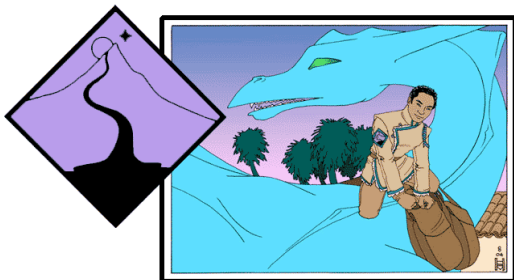
"Or their arses." Lybelle groaned. "I wish that was funnier than it actually is...."

"Better a bad joke *about* a flight than having one as the result." L'ars grinned. "If that's all, Weyrwoman, I need to think about how best to tell our flyboys that their wings are getting clipped. And make sure that my Wing hasn't planned anything *too* extreme for N'dren's return – poor lad's going to need his rest."

"After everything I've heard about Uleka, I imagine he will," Lybelle said dryly, walking her Weyrleader to the door. "Hopefully this will be the last time we need to upset tradition for a while, but Kadanzer luck is a peculiar thing and we've suffered disasters enough this Turn. I really don't see the need to invite more."

"You think disaster needs an invitation around here?"

"No," Lybelle admitted with a sigh, thinking of all that had happened at Kadanzer within her own short tenure in the South. "But we can at least make it harder for it to get in...."



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