
Home Is Where the Heart Lies

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tbd

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The Wing jumped to the skies above Ierne Island.

T'yan noted smugly that he and Jugurth were still perfectly in formation with the rest of his StormWind wingmates as they prepared to meet the second phase of today's 'Fall. The sight boosted his certainty that he had been born to be a dragonrider! He felt his bronze's anticipation and eagerness as the silver-grey flicker of Thread swept across Great Bay towards the massed ranks of the Wings. Wingleader A'nar gave the signal and the dragons surged forward once more to meet their ancient enemy.

And as they had done all those many months since graduating into the fighting Wings, his Jugurth flew and flamed with the rest of them. T'yan's dragon had long since attained his full growth and was a mid-sized bronze. He was not as nimble as a green or blue, but still more manoeuvrable than many other bronzes. However, Jugurth paid for that manoeuvrability by not quite matching the stamina of the older bronzes, much to his chagrin. But the young bronze's vanity and pride wouldn't let him admit that perhaps he was not the best at absolutely everything! T'yan had learned the hard way not to let Jugurth overtax himself in a long 'Fall – his beloved bronze now had a puckered Threadscore scar down one flank, where he had been stubbornly insistent that he was *not* slowing up due to fatigue...

Mine! A clump was sent scudding their way on the breeze, and Jugurth banked to meet it, flaming vigorously. T'yan smiled to see it shrivel to ash and disintegrate. Hah! If only those snotty seaholders who had thought he would amount to nothing could see him now!

He glanced down to the coast and fields of Ierne Island far below them. Because of the pattern of Threadfall and the rotation of the Wings, this was actually the first time he and Jugurth had fought Thread over his home soil since he had become a fully-fledged wingrider. This portion of the 'Fall would work its way southwest, passing over his home hold, then sweeping across the island and on to Dawn Sisters' lands. In a quarter of an hour or so they would be flying directly above his birthplace – Spiderclaw Seahold. A pity the inhabitants would all be hiding away inside, unable to see him and Jugurth defending their lands and their lives...

The glimmer of an idea formed in T'yan's mind.

Thread! Cuvorth claims it! Jugurth's commentary pulled him back to the here and now.

Concentrate! *'Fall is too dangerous to let your mind wander!* Werylingsecond Jallori's words from his time as a weyrling echoed in his mind. T'yan filled his awareness with the patterns of Threadfall and dragon wings around him. Jugurth flamed and then blinked *between* as tiny fragments of burning Thread pattered across his wing edge.

They emerged and T'yan saw another clump above, only partially destroyed by brown Cavalth's flaming. *There!* he sent to his bronze.

I see it. Mine! That Thread is mine! Jugurth gave a massive downstroke and hurtled up towards the clump.

T'yan pushed his newly formed idea to the back of his mind, and let the exhilaration of fighting 'Fall become the be all and end all of his existence.

Later. There would be plenty of time later.



Jugurth was starting to tire – and adamantly claiming that he was not – as the final flurries of Thread were charred out of the sky by the riders above them. T'yan felt his bronze settle gratefully into slow, level flight in formation with the rest of the Wing. There was a gap in the formation: N'kalo and Cavalth had jumped back to the dragonhealers with injuries. And the make-up of the rest was different from the start of 'Fall, as those greens that did not have the stamina to last out the whole 'Fall had, as usual, retired early and been replaced with fresh pairs. Having rested, some of those same greens would be coming back shortly, to assist the Queens' Wing with the final sweeps over the area of the 'Fall.

Garath's rider sends the sweepriders out, Jugurth informed him. **We are not picked.** The bronze sounded piqued by this slur on his ability.

You are too tired, T'yan informed him. *Besides, I have something else we need to do after you are rested.*

Something more important than sweepriding? asked Jugurth.

Oh yes, MUCH more important, the youth replied.

Mollified, the bronze contented himself with speculation on whether the queens had noticed his performance during the 'Fall, and a short while later the signal to transfer back to the Weyr was given.



"T'yan? Aren't you coming to the beach to wash out the firestone from hair and hide?" Lesein paused by Jugurth's wallow, where T'yan was inspecting the tiny pinpricks of Threadscore that marked the leading edge of the bronze's wing. Behind her G'tin and E'darin were also evidently about to head for the bathing beach, scrubbing brushes and towels in hand. Blue Cuvorth and bronze Fordath winged overhead, making a beeline for the shore.

"No, no. Got stuff to do first." T'yan waved her away in an offhand manner. Clad in his fighting gear and stinking of firestone was exactly what he wanted to be at the

moment. Jugurth still had his fighting straps on, though he was slumped into a restful sprawl in his wallow.

"Oh, all right. See you later." Lesein sauntered off after her blue.

Fordath asks if I am injured. I tell him no, Jugurth informed his rider. T'yan glanced over his shoulder to see G'tin approaching. He scowled – he didn't want other bronzeriders butting into his business.

"If you're worried about those scores, get him to the dragonhealers," said G'tin.

T'yan's scowl deepened. Did the man think that he would neglect his dragon? "He's fine. Aren't you, Jugurth?" He slapped the bronze affectionately on the flank. He'd already put redwort ointment on all the pinprick scores, just in case.

G'tin nodded thoughtfully. "Then I'll be seeing you at the beach soon?"

"Yeah, soon," agreed T'yan in what he hoped was a nonchalant manner. "Got some errands to run first."

"Oh?" said G'tin in an interested tone. "It's not Wing business, so where are you in such a rush to be, that you can't bathe your dragon first?"

But T'yan was not inclined to listen or to explain himself. He gave Jugurth a nudge to get him to his feet, and then pointedly pulled his flying helmet on and swung himself up onto his bondmate's back.

G'tin sensibly stepped back to give the bronze wing room for a take off. He said something else, but the words were lost in the rush of air as Jugurth leaped skywards. The bronze ascended with powerful strokes, and T'yan gazed down over the Weyr, feeling a surge of pride that he called this place home. As they ascended they passed over the bathing beach, where many of his StormWind wingmates scrubbed their dragons or lounged in the sand. Below, Nyth and Cuvorth were splashing about playfully in the waves. Fordath sat on the shore, awaiting his rider.

T'yan drew his gaze up to the horizon and sent Jugurth the coordinates for their destination. **Chath greets us.** Jugurth informed him, naming today's watchdragon. **He asks where we are going.**

Did everyone in the Weyr want to know his business today? T'yan muttered insults under his breath. *Just get going, will you?*

The pair blinked *between*.



Jugurth burst from *between* into crisp, clear morning air, heavy with the tang of the sea. The scent brought with it a jarring mix of comfortable familiarity and angry resentment. T'yan scowled down from his bronze's back at the harbour of Spiderclaw Seahold far below, tiny and insignificant looking at this distance. Small shapes of fishing boats clustered along the dock – offloading the catch of fish drawn to the surface by drowned Thread. He imagined the confusion as they spotted the bronze shape in the sky above, and then the consternation as Jugurth banked and headed their way. A malicious grin flickered across his features.

Circle low over the harbour a couple of times, then land on the beach. He sent a mental image of the rocky landing place to his lifemate, remembering blue Trith and green Vedith sitting there on the day that he was Searched, all those months ago. He had been overawed at the sheer size of them... and his Jugurth was much, much bigger than a mere blue.

Jugurth had caught some of these thoughts. **Of course I am much bigger than a blue!** the bronze said indignantly, then added: **And more handsome. All the people are looking at me because I am handsome.**

All the people were looking at him because he was sharding enormous and only a dragonlength above the tallest mast of the fishing fleet, T'yan observed with glee. Some of the people below were gawping, but a fair few were scattering hither and thither, which was just the effect that he was after. A pity that Jugurth had no flame left...

The Seaholder of Spiderclaw, Osmund, was hurrying from the dockside towards them, a scattering of people following him. T'yan thought for a moment about asking Jugurth to veer off and land elsewhere – to make Osmund run the length and breadth of the hold – but no, this was the only reasonable landing spot for a bronze. Besides, here everyone on the dockside and the nearest boats would be able to see him. And T'yan wanted to be seen!

The bronze settled lightly on the rocky beach just down from the docks and folded his wings to his sides. T'yan kept his place on Jugurth's neck as the Holder and the others approached. *Look fierce, can't you?* he demanded of his dragon.

Jugurth rustled his wings irritably. **Of course I can look fierce. I am a bronze! I shall be fierce and handsome and they shall all admire me!** He tipped back his wedge-shaped head and bugled.

The youth had the satisfaction of seeing the seaholders stop dead in their tracks for a moment. Then tentatively Seaholder Osmund and Steward Thurstan came forward. "Welcome to Spiderclaw Seahold, bronzerider," called Osmund. "Is there something amiss? Is there a burrow the groundcrews missed?"

The youth raised his goggles and pulled off his flying helmet.

"Teeyan!" The startled exclamation fell unbidden from Steward Thurstan's lips as he identified who sat astride the dragon before him. From the unhappy expression on the Holder's face, he also recognised the new arrival.

"It's T'yan," the youth growled. There were murmurs and mutterings from the gathered onlookers on the docks and decks.

He saw Osmund take a deep breath as the Seaholder mentally gathered himself. "Bronzerider T'yan," he said, with an attempt at a courteous nod.

T'yan suppressed a smirk. This was every bit as satisfying as he'd anticipated. He'd initially thought about having Jugurth push some nets or barrels into the harbour, or put his claws through a sail or two. But simply watching Osmund squirm like this was almost as fun. Especially as more and more of the seaholders were drifting down the dockside toward the imposing figure of Jugurth.

"Ah... how can we be of assistance, bronzerider?" Osmund enquired warily.

"I have a message," T'yan announced, then added haughtily: "But not for *you*."

"For who, then, bronzerider?" Osmund asked. Beside him, the Steward shifted from foot to foot unhappily.

"They'll know when they hear it," T'yan snapped. He raised his voice, pitching his voice to carry to the nearest onlookers. "I am T'yan, rider of bronze Jugurth. My mother, Ellya, is assistant to the Weyrleader at Kadanzer Weyr. My sister Lya is standing Candidate to be a dragonrider. My brother Ekalt is apprenticed to the Herders. My sister Enyia will apprentice to the Harpers when she is of age." There was more than a little exaggeration to some of that, but there was enough truth in it to fill his voice with fierce pride. T'yan raked his gaze across the muttering seaholders, noting with satisfaction as some of them glanced across to those in the crowd who shared blood with him but who had never once in his life acknowledged it. Even Seaholder Osmund darted a gaze that way.

"I am T'yan, rider of bronze Jugurth - and one day my bronze will catch a queen and make me Weyrleader!" Jugurth echoed that sentiment with a triumphant bugle.

The call of a second bronze dragon echoed his call. T'yan suppressed his surprise at that, and gave what he hoped was a casual glance aloft, mirroring the upward looks of the anxious seaholders. There was another dragon circling in the sky above the hold.

Fordath asks what we are doing. I tell him we are being fierce.

T'yan scowled. So G'tin was checking up on him, was he? Well never mind – he'd achieved the bulk of what he'd come here to do. The Spiderclaw inhabitants had seen Teeyan the drudge transformed into T'yan the dragonrider. They'd quailed at Jugurth's size and power, even if his thoughts of scuttling a ship or shredding all the tiles off the Main Hold had not come to fruition. He jammed his helmet back onto his head. *C'mon, let's see if we can't kick something into the water as we take off!*

Why would I want to do that? asked Jugurth.

Because it will look impressive, and they'll always remember you.

Oh. Jugurth tensed the muscles in his hindquarters, ready for takeoff. ***They will remember me, even when I do not remember them? That is good.*** He executed a half pirouette as he sprang upwards, sending his tail whiplashing round and knocking a stack of spiderclaw creels flying. From the satisfying splash from behind as they took off, something – or if he was lucky, someone – had ended up in the sea.

Fordath says his rider wishes us to return to the Weyr with them, Jugurth informed him. T'yan felt a stab of rebellion and briefly considered having the bronze jump somewhere else entirely, just to annoy the other bronzerider. G'tin wasn't his wingleader or wingsecond, to be bossing him about. But on the other hand, the fortuitous appearance of Fordath had no doubt emphasised the drama of his spur of the moment claim he would be Weyrleader one day. The seaholders would have had no idea that Fordath's call was more challenge than confirmation.

Weyrleader. It was an interesting thought. T'yan slapped his bronze affectionately on the neck. *C'mon, let's go home.*



"What in Faranth's name did you think you were doing?" G'tin was seemingly lying in wait for the moment T'yan had dismounted.

The youth glowered back. "None of your business."

"Really?" G'tin folded his arms and gave him an icy stare. "Might it be Wingleader A'nar's business? Or the Weyrwoman's? I'm sure they'd be fascinated to hear what had a whole seahold of Ierne Islanders swarming about their docks like a nest of crazed treehoppers."

The implied threat stopped T'yan from just turning on his heel and walking away from the other man. "I just went home for a visit," he blustered. "Nothin' wrong with that."

"And 'being fierce'? Is that a normal part of visits home?" G'tin enquired with a touch of ice to his voice. "Fordath informs me that both of you were 'being fierce' so that you would be remembered."

Jugurth, thought T'yan irritably, was way too much of a blabbermouth. He gave a sulky shrug.

G'tin sighed wearily, reminding him of Weyrsecond Jallori when someone in her class had done something unremittingly stupid. "You should know this, because you're one of them – Ierne Islanders are a prickly lot at the best of times, and doubly so when Thread falls on their land and Lord Heln thinks he has cause to complain to the Weyr."

T'yan blinked in surprise. There had been burrows?

G'tin had caught his expression. "So you didn't know? Too eager to be off on your little visit, no doubt. Well, yes, there were four burrows that had to be burned out by the sweepriders and the groundcrews. Four burrows that will have Lord Heln once again questioning the efficiency of the Weyr and our rights to Search his holds. So—" The older man fixed T'yan with a stare that made him squirm. "—Will those seaholders be petitioning to their Lord about a rogue bronzerider laying waste to their dockside?"

"We didn't do any harm. Just gave them a bit of a fright." Which they rightly deserved, in T'yan's opinion.

"So it will just be a report of frightening their womenfolk, then?"

The youth's scowl deepened, but he dropped his gaze from G'tin's penetrating stare. "They deserved it, for what they did to my Ma."

"Many people deserve many things," said G'tin. "Dragonriders who mar the Weyr's reputation, for instance."

T'yan stared at his boots. It was so unfair! All he'd done was show those arrogant seaholders that they had to show him some respect, and he had G'tin threatening to tattle on him to the Weyrwoman. He didn't want her mad at him. More importantly he didn't want Ihyanith mad at Jugurth.

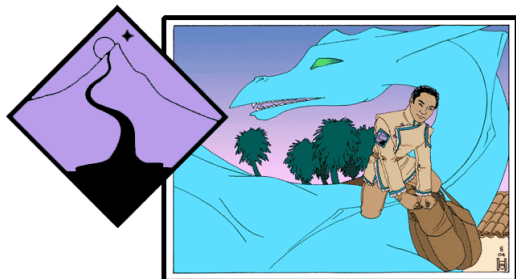
There was silence from G'tin.

He glanced up, and found the man looking at him with head cocked slightly to one side, as if waiting for a response.

Jugurth's mental voice interrupted the awkward silence. ***Fordath says will you please finish talking to his rider. He wishes to have a bath. I wish to have a bath too.***

Yeah, yeah – in a little while. T'yan sighed. He was going to regret this. "I'm going to see the Weyrwoman," he said to G'tin. "You coming?"

G'tin gave a nod. "Of course. What are wingmates for?"



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