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# Mandor's Journey

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## 2860.11.21 – Inden Hold, Izmir

“A little bit tighter there. The edges of the wound have to be held together or it won't heal properly.”

Mandor did as his brother directed, pulling just tightly enough on the stitching to seal up the injury to the young man's leg. Nearby, from behind his brother, he heard another voice.

“Is it going to be all right, healer? It looked very bad when they brought him in.”

That would be the lad's mother, if memory served. It had been she who had sent for his brother Brendyr, one of the journeyman healers assigned here to Inden Hold in Izmir. As Mandor was currently an apprentice and studying under his brother's tutelage, he had been brought along as a learning experience to treat the young herder who had managed to get himself gored by one of the family's prize bulls.

“He'll be just fine, ma'am,” Brendyr said as he peered over the younger healer's shoulder to make sure that his work was up to standard. “It wasn't as bad as it looked at first. Keep him off his feet for a few days. We'll come back to change the dressing and make sure that no infection has set in.”

Mandor tuned out the conversation as he set his mind to dressing the now-stitched wound. Brendyr had told the truth. While it looked bad at first, it wasn't much more than several painful flesh wounds. As long as no infection set in and the boy didn't try to be too active while it was healing, he wouldn't have any lasting effects save some interesting scars. Standing up finally and stretching his cramped muscles, Mandor gave their patient a reassuring smile. The boy was fourteen or fifteen perhaps, just a bit younger than his own sixteen Turns, and had borne the procedure bravely without crying out much.

“There you go, friend. Should be good as new in a few days. Don't go messing around with those bulls till then, all right?”

The younger man groaned just a bit. Fortunately for him the numbweed eased most of the pain. Any reply he might have made, though, was interrupted by Brendyr's call for Mandor's attention.

“Are you done there, brother? It's time for us to be going. We have to look in on Father.”

“I'm through here. We can go now.”

Mandor gathered his things, bade the family farewell and followed his older brother out into the warm afternoon air. They walked along in silence for a time before Brendyr finally spoke.

“You did good work back there. It was a pretty nice job of stitching, but more importantly, you did a good job keeping the patient calm. He responded well to you.”

The compliment took Mandor a bit by surprise. Normally his brother was harder on him than any of his other teachers had ever been. He suspected it was a bit of overcompensation, since it was unusual for a journeyman healer to train an apprentice from his own family.

Due to their father's condition, though, a temporary exception had been made in their case. Their father, Danyl, had been the healer as well for many Turns until age, illness and infirmity had forced his retirement. Brendyr, as the oldest son, took his father in and was caring for him.

An accident, not too long after Mandor had been born, had crippled their father. That same accident had also been the death of their mother. His condition steadily deteriorated over the Turns until, in recent months, Danyl had also developed a wasting disease. Now it was only a matter of time before he passed on and the Healer Hall had allowed Mandor to return home as a courtesy to their family. For the time being, anyway, the Master Healer was allowing him to study with his brother.

“Thank you, Brendyr. I just talked to him and said what seemed right. He was a very good patient.”

“That is one of the most important parts of being a healer. You need a strong empathy with the patient. If you can't put their mind at ease and gain their trust then your job will be a lot harder. Keep up with your studies and I can see you making journeyman yourself by the time you're eighteen or nineteen. Then you can work towards a nice little posting of your own somewhere.”

Mandor rolled that around in his mind as they walked back towards the central square of Inden Hold. It was what he had been training for since he was eleven. A posting of his own, continuing to learn his craft and perhaps starting a family of his own. Maybe one day he would even earn the coveted rank of Master. Part of him wanted that more than anything. Another part of him, though, yearned for more. What more there was to yearn for eluded him. It just seemed that there should be more to life, though he couldn't quite put his finger on what it should be.

“When you first walked the tables and became a journeyman, Brendyr, what was it like?”

“Oh, it was a grand thing. Father was so very proud. You were too young to remember but he wasn't as sickly back then. Shortly after, I got this posting and moved us all here.”

Mandor was too young to remember, it was true, but he did remember the move here and how his brother and Treya his wife had pretty much raised him as their own. He also had heard, though no one talked about it much, that their father had married late, after joining his craft late in life by most people's standards. Mandor didn't know the story behind that but suspected that his brother did.

Brendyr was the oldest, then their sisters, and finally Mandor was born, the last of six children. When his wife died Danyl's health really began to go downhill so it had been mostly his sisters and Brendyr who had cared for both him and Mandor. Now the old man was confined to his bed and would likely be dead before the end of the Turn. Fortunately, Danyl had some highly-placed friends within their Craft. That was another story which no one had ever bothered to share with Mandor, but he knew that was why he had been allowed to return and spend a final few sevendays with his family instead of continuing his studies within the Healer Hall.

Before either brother could say another word, they were distracted by a flash of color high above them and then the sound beating wings. Looking upwards in surprise they saw two dragons in the sky. They circled for a moment and then made straight for the center of the Hold. Brendyr and Mandor looked at one another in surprise and then began to walk at a faster pace. It would take them several minutes more to walk than it would for the dragons to fly, but neither of them wanted to miss this. Something mysterious was definitely up.



Mandor was not in quite as good shape as his older brother. Where Brendyr was long and lanky, Mandor was shorter and heavier-set. He was not fat by any stretch of the imagination, but he wasn't built for speed either. Instead he was broad across the shoulders and chest with a thick neck and short, powerfully built limbs. When people first saw him they usually thought that he was perhaps a miner or a farmer accustomed to heavy labor. That he was a healer, and a gentle, reflective one at that, surprised people.

Brendyr made better time and arrived several seconds before his brother, who could not match his long strides. When Mandor finally caught up he found most of the young people in the Hold were lining up in the square. Nearby, two dragons lay curled in the sun and were watching the proceedings with expressions that could best be described as mildly bored. One of these was brown and the other blue. Not being the larger colors, neither was particularly large by dragon standards, Mandor thought. Still though, they were downright enormous by his reckoning.

Near to where the youngsters were lining up were the riders of the two dragons. One of them, a man of medium build and dark skin, suddenly took note of the two of them standing there. This one strode over to where they stood and then seemingly took notice of Brendyr's rank cords.

"Ho there Healer," he said to Brendyr in a voice that seemed a trifle loud. "How old is your young apprentice here?"

"Sixteen. Why?"

Brendyr sounded worried, though about what Mandor couldn't guess.

"Ah, excellent," the loud-voiced man said. "I am G'rian, rider of blue Khuth from Kadanzer. We ride on Search. He should join the others in the line."

For a moment Mandor thought that his brother was going to refuse the dragonrider. After several long moments though he finally nodded and turned to speak with his younger brother.

"Go ahead, Mandor. There's nothing to be afraid of. They can't make you go if you don't want to."

It seemed a curious thing to say. Mandor wasn't afraid. Instead he was rather fascinated, as much by the dragons as by his brother's odd behavior. He had never known Brendyr to be so nervous. Instead of speaking up, though, he merely nodded, first to his brother and then to the smiling dragonrider, before walking over and taking up a position at the end of the line.

If he thought that Brendyr's reaction was odd he hadn't seen anything yet. He knew all of the others in the line. They were the other teens and young adults from Inden. Most of them stared in either open fear or awe at both the dragons and their riders. Some seemed to be suppressing sobs and others tried to stand up even taller to hide their fears. All of this struck Mandor as rather odd. While he had never been this close to a dragon he found that he didn't fear them. Something about them just seemed to feel right. Now he had to wonder, why was it that he didn't feel the same fear that the others did?

"All right you lot," the other dragonrider called out. This one was shorter but stockier than the other, and of course, his voice was much less loud so that he had to project more to be heard above the chatter in the square. "There isn't anything to be scared of. My name is M'mon and this is Neyth," he said indicating the large brown dragon whom they were now lined up in front of. "We ride in Search of candidates to stand for a Hatching. A letter with the names of those chosen will be sent to the Holder in a few days. Stay calm and don't be afraid. This will be over before you know it."

Despite M'mon's warning it was apparent that several of the young people in the line were afraid. For a moment M'mon looked at the dragon and it appeared, at least to Mandor, that they were talking in some way without words. Neyth's great neck then snaked out towards those standing in line and most of them scattered or stepped backwards. The dragon took his time sniffing at each of the young people in succession.

Every so often Neyth looked towards his rider and would seemingly say something in whatever silent means of communication that they shared. Mandor suspected that they were a bit amused by the panic this was causing. Perhaps they were looking to see who had the nerve to be in such close proximity to the dragon? One by one Neyth continued to examine them until, finally, it was Mandor's turn. The great head swung around on its long neck till it was just a few short feet in front of Mandor and the dragon regarded him as he had the others. On a sudden impulse, and perhaps to prove that he wasn't afraid, Mandor reached out a hand and gently laid it on the brown hide.

To his surprise the dragon didn't pull away. Nor did his rider seem to mind. Looking towards M'mon, he saw an enigmatic smile creep onto the dragonrider's face.

“That’s a good lad. He seems to like you. What’s your name?”

“Mandor, sir, apprentice healer.”

M’mon nodded and then shared a look with G’rian who was standing across the square. It was only then, when he looked towards where the bluerider and his brother stood, that Mandor saw the stricken expression on Brendyr’s face. Had he done something wrong? He didn’t think so but his brother was definitely troubled.

“So apprentice, you’re not afraid of him?”

His attention called back to M’mon, Mandor replied “No, Brownrider, I don’t fear him. He’s magnificent.”

This seemed to be exactly the response that M’mon had been looking for. Just that quick, the inspection was over. G’rian and his over-loud voice was heard again.

“All right everyone, we’re done here. Thank you for your cooperation and sorry for disturbing you.”

The two riders turned to leave, as did the rest of the young people that they had been inspecting. Mandor watched everyone leave and then made his way over to his brother. Brendyr had regained his composure, but it was still clear that something troubled him.

“Brendyr? What is it? What’s the matter?”

His brother stared at him for a moment, his expression unreadable. Finally he gave a great sigh and then motioned for him to follow.

“Nothing, Mandor. It’s all right. I think it’s time that we go talk to Father though.”

His head full of questions, Mandor silently obeyed and followed his brother to their cot at the edge of the hold.



Mandor sat outside his father’s bedroom with some apprehension. Brendyr had gone on in to talk and told him to sit here and not to move until he was sent for. What in the world was the problem, he wondered? He had never known Brendyr to act like this. To be sure, his brother chided him often about what he called his crazy dreams. Mandor loved to listen to the Harper tales or to daydream. He always seemed, at least so Brendyr maintained, to be a million miles away except when he was absorbed in his healing work. So he liked knowing about far off places and thinking beyond just the one little hold he found himself in. So he wasn’t afraid of the dragons, but was instead fascinated. Was that so bad?

He didn’t have long to wonder. As he was mulling all this over he heard his brother’s voice calling him into the room. Mandor stood, took a moment to compose himself and then opened the door. Inside he saw his father, weak and frail but apparently in very good spirits. Nearby his brother sat in a chair, looking concerned.

“My boy,” Danyl said, his voice barely more than a whisper. “Your brother tells me that you might be chosen to Stand for a Hatching.”

“Too soon to say,” Mandor shrugged. “They said they would send a letter to the Holder later, to say if anyone was chosen.”

“Father, please,” Brendyr began before Danyl waved off his protestations.

“Your brother is worried for you, boy. It’s his right, you know, so don’t think too harshly of him for it. He worries that you might dream too far and fail as I did.”

Mandor looked from his father to his brother and tried to read from their faces what this might all be about. Failing in that he finally spoke up.

“Father, I don’t understand. What did you fail at? And why is it a bad thing that the dragonriders took notice of me?”

Danyl patted the edge of his bed, motioning for Mandor to sit with him.

“It isn’t a bad thing at all, son. In fact, it might be a great opportunity for you. What I failed at was in fact the exact same opportunity.”

“You stood for a Hatching, Father? When?”

“Long before either of you were born, my son. The dragons came to my Hold when I was a boy of fifteen Turns. I was chosen to return with them to the Weyr. I stood for that Hatching and then for several others. Sadly though, I was never chosen.”

It was at this point that Brendyr spoke up.

“Being chosen in the Search is not the same as Impressing. You might go and never be chosen. Father paid a high price for just that very thing.”

“He’s right, though not so much as he thinks,” Danyl said. “Yes, I lost several Turns there that I could have devoted fully to studying my craft and building a family. Eventually, I was too old to stand for any more Hatchings and couldn’t bear to remain at the Weyr any longer if there was no hope that I would Impress.”

Danyl’s expression turned sad and he paused for several long moments before he continued his tale.

“One of my cousins was a master in the Healer craft. He put in a good word for me and eventually I became a Healer apprentice at the Weyr. I’m afraid that I wasn’t very focused early on and instead thought more of dragons than my studies. Still, I was good enough that when I left I was able to make Journeyman before my accident crippled me and took your mother. I wouldn’t have traded my experience at the Weyr for anything, though. I had a chance, Mandor. Now, maybe you will too.”

“Father,” Brendyr argued, “You could have been a master yourself if you had followed your craft instead of chasing after dragons. I just don’t want Mandor to be disappointed like you were. What if he wastes Turns of his life chasing after a dream?”

“What if he catches his dream?” Danyl replied calmly. “Mandor has a restless spirit. You’ve seen it and commented on it. Will he ever be happy with a quiet posting somewhere? You are, and it suits you, but you shouldn’t try to make him live your dream if he has a chance at his.”

Mandor listened to them argue back and forth for a bit before he finally spoke up.

“They haven’t asked me to come to the Hatching yet.”

“They will, son. I feel it in my bones. Yes, you come from a long line of healers, but we also have a few

dragonriders in our family tree. Your mother was weyrborn and the illegitimate daughter of a bronzerider.”

Mandor noticed as his brother cringed a bit at the mention of their mother’s illegitimacy. So that was the big family secret no one had told him. His father was a failed candidate and his mother had been illegitimate. It didn’t trouble him much one way or the other, but he knew that his brother, as well as most other people at the hold, would find that a cause for great shame. As he considered that, his father continued to speak.

“If they do and you go, you might well fail as I did. You have an advantage that I didn’t, though. You already have most of your apprentice training completed, and there are healers there. If you fail at Impressing I’m sure you can study your craft there with them. The Weyr can always use skilled healers even if you don’t become a dragonrider. If you’ve the stomach for it, the Weyr can be a fine life.”

“But Father,” Mandor began in a small voice. “Your health...if I were to leave...”

Danyl laid a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Don’t you dare stay on my account. Stay if you don’t want to go, but not because of me. I would die happier knowing you were there and had your chance... if that chance was what you really wanted. Remember, there aren’t a lot of healers, but more people can study our art than can Impress the dragons. Without them, the rest of us couldn’t hope to survive.”

Having said his piece, Danyl was wracked by a sudden coughing fit. Brendyr and Mandor propped him up so that he could breathe easier and then gave him some tea laced with anise and fellis to ease the cough and help him to sleep. They stayed with him for a bit till the tea did its work and he drifted into a fitful slumber. After he was asleep the two brothers crept out of the room and downstairs into the kitchen. Mandor sat to think while Brendyr brewed up some klah for them.

“Do you really think it would be so bad if I went?”

Brendyr turned and glanced at his younger brother. He sighed once and then spoke in a quiet tone.

“No, it wouldn’t be that bad. I would wish you well, and truth be told, I’m sure it is what Father really wants. He’s right that it would be a good opportunity for you. I just don’t want for you to be disappointed as he was.”

Mandor nodded his understanding. Brendyr was just trying to look out for him. He had never really considered that it was possible to go to the Weyr before. He had always wanted to travel, though, and to see more of the world. Deep in his soul he knew some adventure called to him and that his world had to be bigger than a small healing posting somewhere. Being a healer was a grand calling. Maybe being a dragonrider, if he could do it, would be grander still.

“If they call for me, Brendyr, I want to go.”

“Then that is what you should do,” Brendyr said, his voice a barely audible whisper. He put a cup in front of his younger brother and the two of them sipped their drinks in silence.

## 2860.11.27

The days that followed were much the same as the ones that had come before. There was always work to do, be it someone in need of healing or lessons that needed to be studied. Mandor was after all still an apprentice and his brother always made sure to try and keep him busy. Now, after the Search riders had been through, Brendyr seemed even more adamant that his younger brother keep his nose to the grindstone.

Even if they had no patients that needed tending there were supplies that needed to be sorted and herbs that needed preparing. Mandor bore it all with good grace and did everything that was asked of him. His days were filled with chores and his nights with studying some of the instructional scrolls provided by the Healer Hall. He tried his best to put dragons from his mind.

On the evening of the sixth day after the Search riders had left, Mandor was studying a particularly difficult lesson about the circulatory system and pressure points for stopping blood flow to limbs. He looked down at the illustrations on the scroll and then had to demonstrate on his brother by applying pressure at the correct point.

“Try again, Mandor. If you’re too soft in your touch then the blood will still flow too quickly. That can be fatal for an accident victim.”

Mandor grimaced and pressed down on the inside of his Brendyr’s elbow.

“That’s right, just like that,” the older healer said. “If I had a bleeding wound in the forearm that would be enough pressure to hold the blood back long enough for another healer to get a proper tourniquet into place or to dress the wound.”

They were both distracted in their discussion by the sudden sound of large, beating wings. Both of them looked up at once and then at each other. Brendyr’s face displayed his misgivings immediately but Mandor was too excited to be concerned with his brother’s fears at the moment. He rushed to the door, with Brendyr close behind him, and threw it open. Outside they saw a green dragon settle down in the meadow beyond their cot. The rider, a young woman, slid from the dragon’s back and removed her riding helmet as she strode towards them.

“Would you be Mandor?” she asked in a pleasant voice when she got closer.

He nodded mutely, as he alternated his gaze between the dragon and the pretty young rider. She was not so much older than himself and it surprised him to see such a young woman riding a dragon. She took note of his expression and offered a friendly smile before continuing.

“Well, I’m Palora, the watchrider from Izmir, and this is Xeraquith. I have a message to deliver to Journeyman Healer Danyl.”

Mandor stood mutely as Brendyr moved to speak with the dragon rider. He was dimly aware that his brother had ushered their guest inside and on towards their father’s bedroom. She had recognized him, he realized. Obviously someone had told her what had happened with the Search



riders. Had they described him to her perhaps? Or maybe she had heard that a young man with healer's knots had dared to reach out and touch the dragon?

For the moment anyway he had no answers. All he knew was that he was left alone in the front room to think and to wonder what this all meant. Had she brought his invitation? He would have to wait to find out.

A few minutes later Palora and Brendyr left their father's room and closed the door softly behind them. Seeing him standing there, looking expectantly at them, they walked over to join him.

"You've been invited to attend the Hatching," Palora said. "The Healer Hall has approved for you to continue your studies at the Weyr and your father has also given his blessing if you wish to go."

Mandor realized that he had been holding his breath every since they had left his father's room. Relaxing now in his relief Mandor finally found his voice.

"Yes, thank you. I want to go. Do I need to bring anything special?"

"No, just your clothes. Travel light because candidates don't have much room to store extra things. I've other messages to deliver before we go so I'll be back for you tomorrow around midday."

With that she turned and, after fastening her helmet back into place, mounted her dragon. Mandor and Brendyr watched for several long moments as they became airborne and then disappeared from view entirely and slipped *between*.

"Well, I guess that's settled," Brendyr finally spoke. "I guess we can cancel the rest of the lesson for the night."

Mandor couldn't help but hear the defeated tone in his brother's voice. He knew deep down that Brendyr only wanted what he thought was best for him.

"Not necessarily Brendyr. Remember what Father said. I might not Impress so it would probably be better to keep up with my studies, don't you think?"

Brendyr studied his younger brother for a long moment in silence. Finally a small smile came to his face.

"I suppose. We can finish this lesson in the morning though. For tonight I'll leave you to sit with Father for awhile. I imagine you two will have a lot to talk about.

With that, Brendyr turned to go upstairs and join his wife in their room. Mandor understood his brother's misgivings and was grateful that he was being this accepting of the situation. As he had promised, Brendyr left Mandor and their father to talk for as long as the old man's strength held up. This might after all be their last chance to spend time together and Danyl wanted to tell his youngest son everything he could remember of Weyr life. Whatever personal satisfaction he felt by being chosen to attend the Hatching, Mandor realized that it made his father very proud.

Later, finally alone with his thoughts, Mandor tried to come to terms with the choice he had made. It felt right to him, even if he was nervous. It troubled him to be leaving his family and that he might never see his father alive again. His being chosen, though, had made Danyl so happy. Even if his father died tomorrow, Mandor realized that this was the

best possible gift he could have given him. By this time tomorrow he would be in the Weyr. From there he would Impress a dragon if luck was with him. If not, he would continue his healer training and work to keep the riders healthy enough to fight Thread. It definitely would not be a quiet posting like Brendyr sought, but something wild and exciting. The idea definitely suited Mandor and he eventually slipped into a fitful slumber.



**2860.11.28**

Midday arrived with a warm, drizzly rain. Mandor waited by his father's bedside as the others gathered in the front room. The old healer was in a fitful sleep and wouldn't be waking anytime soon. It still felt right to Mandor, though, to remain by his side as long as he could. From the other room he could hear Brendyr and Treya's voices as they entertained the local Holder, who had come as a sort of official witness to his being chosen for the Hatching. Mandor didn't really care much about all of that. He was both anxious to start his new life but still mindful of all that he was leaving behind.

While he waited he looked over his few belongings. A change of clothes, a few marks that Brendyr had insisted that he take and his carving knife were all he had to his name. That and his letter of invitation of course. He wished that his father was well enough to be awake and talk with him some more but it was not to be. Their long talk into the night had tired Danyl greatly and he likely would sleep most of the day away.

Time passed and Mandor considered taking out his knife to carve for a bit. Often he would carve or whittle if he was nervous or just wanted to think. Finally he decided against it. Palora would show up any moment... wouldn't she? Instead he leaned back in his chair and tried not to be so aware of the passage of time.

How much more time passed he couldn't say. Longer than he liked but not so long as he feared. Eventually he heard the now familiar sound of a dragon in motion which was shortly after followed by the sound of the front door opening. Apparently the Holder had gone out to greet the rider. This was followed by another quiet knock on his father's door. Before he could reply the door was opened a crack and he heard Treya's voice.

"The dragon rider is here Mandor. It's time."

With one last look at his father's sleeping form Mandor gathered his few things and joined Treya at the door. She didn't say a word. Instead she just gave him a gentle hug and a reassuring smile. Beyond her Brendyr was waiting.

"Promise me that you'll keep up on your studies Mandor. I'd hate to think we wasted all that time."

The tone was teasing but Mandor could tell that his brother still had misgivings.

"I promise Brendyr. Impression or not, I'll still make you proud."

Now it was his brother who hugged him. Brendyr didn't seem to have any more words though. To Mandor's eyes it seemed that he was too choked up now to say any more to the younger brother that he had helped to raise. Instead he merely released Mandor from his fierce bear hug, gave him a firm pat on the shoulder and then stood aside so that he could go on to the future that awaited him.

"Ho there, Mandor. All ready to go, are you?"

Mandor turned towards Palora's voice. It didn't take long to realize that she was anxious to get going. Apparently she had little stomach for the local Holder and all the official foolishness that accompanied an occasion like this.

"Yes greenrider, I'm ready," he said with a smile.

Palora returned his smile and bid him to join her by the dragon's side.

"Very good. The Weyr will appreciate promptness. I know that I sure do. You're the last one today that I'm taking in from the Izmir region and the only one who didn't make me suffer through a long, teary goodbye with their family. For Faranath's sake, they are only going to the Weyr, not off to war!"

"I've said my goodbyes," he said with only a touch of sadness in his voice. "My father is very happy that I'm going. My brother is a bit less happy but still gives me his blessing."

While he talked she helped him to put on a riding helmet and then showed him how to mount the dragon and secure the straps. It was fairly obvious that he had never once been on a dragon so she took extra care to show him how everything had to fit together and how to get on without breaking his neck. Once he was secure she climbed on and saw to her own straps and made sure that all was ready.

"Ready?" she asked, only a hint of amusement in her voice.

He merely nodded, unable to say anything, really. She glanced back over her shoulder and smiled again. Apparently she was used to this reaction as well as he seemed lost in his thoughts and just enjoyed the feel of the great beast he sat astride.

"All right then. Hold on tight."

With a leap the green was airborne. In that second it felt as if all the air had been pulled from Mandor's chest. In less time than it took to tell it they were many dragonlengths into the air. Palora was still talking, he realized, but he had trouble focusing on what she was saying. Something about going *between*, perhaps? His father had described that to him in great detail, so he thought he would be ready for that. What he hadn't anticipated was the sudden shock of being a dozen dragonlengths or more in the air.

His heart felt sure to beat its way out of his chest and he had to remind himself to breathe eventually. Now was not a good time to realize that he had a fear of heights. They just circled lazily over the hold for a bit till he became aware of what she was saying.

"It's all right Mandor. Nothing to be scared of. You're securely strapped in. I could fly us upside down and you wouldn't come loose."

"Please don't."

She laughed a bit and it seemed to help ease his worry. His fear and shock began to ease as he became accustomed to the sensation. Eventually he grew more used to it and his anxiety dissolved to a more manageable level.

"How did you know that I was so scared?" he finally managed to ask.

"Well, it's an understandable reaction that most candidates have at first. That and you about squeezed the life out of me when we took off."

With a start he realized that he still had his arms wrapped tightly around her and was holding on for dear life.

"Oh," he said with some embarrassment. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right," she said as his grip eased a bit. "No need to be ashamed."

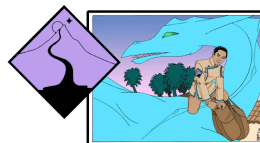
They flew a little more, allowing him to become fully used to it. After a short time he actually began to enjoy both the experience of flying as well as that of being so close to Palora. That she didn't seem to object to that either went a long way to easing his apprehension. Once he was ready, she again described to him what would happen when they slipped *between*. When he indicated that he was as prepared as he could be she gave her dragon the order to take them to Kadanzer.

All the talking in the world can't really prepare one for the first time they go *between*. The total darkness and bone-chilling cold were everything he had been told they were. The strange disorientation that came with it was an odd sensation but he knew that it wouldn't last long. All told, though, he handled the trip *between* much better than he had the actual flying. After what seemed to be only a very few seconds they emerged from the darkness and into the bright sunlight over Kadanzer Weyr.

Mandor had never seen such sights. There were dragons everywhere he looked. Many were in the sky flying about. Others he could see sunning themselves or frolicking in the waters of an impossibly large ocean that he had never seen the like of before. Below them spread the many colorful buildings of the Weyr itself. He couldn't even guess yet as to the function of each building but all of them were new and magical to him. Just then, Palora drew his attention to a great golden figure in the distance.

"There, that is the caldera Hatching Grounds. Nioranth stands guard over her clutch. Those are the eggs you're going to Stand for at the Hatching."

He stared, mesmerized by the sight. She was a long way off but there was no mistaking that this was anything other than a regal queen. Did his future dragon lie within one of those eggs warming in the sun? Only time would tell but he certainly hoped that it did. To Impress a dragon of his own was the only thing missing from this magical journey. Mandor felt deep down that suddenly, after all of his sixteen Turns, he had finally come home.



Kadanzer Weyr

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