
Casualties

by Amanda Kear

Ninth Pass: 2439.11.13

Printed in FTA #22 (2005)

This story is printed by Kadanzer Weyr (www.kadanzer.org), a fan club approved by Anne McCaffrey in 1995. Kadanzer Weyr is a non-profit group -- all materials pertaining to Ms. McCaffrey's works displayed on this website may only be accessed for personal, non-commercial purposes. Please do not reproduce without permission. All references to worlds and characters based on Anne McCaffrey's fiction are copyright© Anne McCaffrey 1967, 2005, all rights reserved, and used by permission of the author. The Dragonriders of Pern® is registered U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, by Anne McCaffrey, used here with permission. Use or reproduction without a license is strictly prohibited.

Mine! Mulujath called out his claim on a tangle of Thread to their right and banked to meet it, flaming. The wind buffeted Wingsecond N'larion's face and flecks of hot ash tumbled by as his brown charred their ancient enemy to oblivion.

The wind is changing, N'larion observed with a frown. Ahead of them green Nuvith surged forward to meet another clump, then backwinged frantically to brake her forward momentum as the wind sent the Thread twisting towards her. She skipped *between* just in time to avoid a collision.

I had noticed... Nuvith has noticed too. Mulujath's trademark sarcasm well to the fore as the brown flamed the clump that had almost claimed the green.

N'larion snorted. *Pass the word to Weyrleader L'tan. If it gets rough we may have to spell some of the blues and greens earlier than planned. How is Kireth's wing holding up?*

She says she is fine, but Yakuth and Ladakth say she is tiring. They think her rider is embarrassed by how easily Kireth was caught when she rose. The green had wrenched her wing in a mating flight – possibly the shortest Southern Weyr had ever seen. A startled blue had caught Kireth only a handful of dragonlengths from the ground and almost crashed trying to keep the pair of them aloft.

There's no fool like a holdbred fool, N'larion growled. D'loren was not happy with what impressing a green entailed. He seemed to view Kireth's accident and unexpectedly shortened mating flight as a further indignity and slur on his manhood. He'd harassed the dragonhealers every day until Kireth was deemed fit enough to fly fall. Now it appeared he was pushing his green to too great an exertion. *Tell the pair of them to get back to the Weyr. We'll cover the gap until her replacement arrives.*

Kireth repeats that she—

The shaffing fool! The wingsecond muttered a further string of invective against thick-headed holdbred riders. *Mulujath, get down there now. Tell Nuvith and Veratyth we're moving out of position to cover Kireth.*

His bondmate obediently folded his wings and dropped to where Kireth flew in the second level of L'tan's Wing's fighting formation. The brown rode out a turbulent eddy and belched a small gout of flame to catch a strand of Thread that Nuvith warned him was coming their way.

Kireth's right wing stroke was indeed starting to look laboured as the wind buffeted and battered at the dragons. Flames blossomed above as a blue chased a dancing tangle of wind tossed Thread. Writhing fragments escaped the blue and dropped between the green and brown, heading down to where the Queen's wing waited below.

Shards, but one of them should have caught that! N'larion caught D'loren's eye and pumped an urgent and angry hand signal, backed up by another message through Mulujath: *Back to the Weyr now!*

The green obediently – finally – vanished *between*, just as an updraft lifted Mulujath in a moment of weightlessness. The missed clump of Thread – so much lighter than a half-Benden brown – hurtled skywards on the wind. Mulujath twisted to flame it, but the updraft proved too much. Acid strands wrapped round N'larion and his brown.

Mulujath bellowed in pain and blinked *between*.



N'larion came slowly back to awareness, a low but pitiful crooning in his ears. He blinked open rheumy eyes and turned his head to find his green firelizard, Fern, crouched on the pillow beside him. She gave a small, excited squeak and stretched forward to rub her small head against him. The brownrider muzzily reached to pet her – but found that his right arm remained sluggish and unresponsive on the bed beside him, barely quivering as he tried to raise it. Pain flared from his shoulder to his elbow.

Mulujath! They'd been Threaded – where was Mulujath? N'larion had a brief moment of terror that he might be dragonless, and then his mind settled on the comforting shape of Mulujath's mind interlinked with his own. The brown was asleep, not stirring mentally at N'larion's touch.

He rubbed at his eyes with his left hand, recognising in himself now the after effects of fellis and the surroundings of the infirmary, dim in the evening light. Flashes of memory returned – Mulujath falling from the sky over the Weyr with one wing all but useless... him tumbling from his dragon's back into the arms of the healers... his and Mulujath's pain blending into one...

Fern squeaked again, but this time at the approach of one of the healers. "Ah, you are awake, Wingsecond." Master Reilen gave his best bedside smile.

"Mulujath... how is...?"

Reilen sat down. "I'll let the dragonhealers deliver the official verdict, but suffice to say Mulujath suffered a bad wing injury and will be out of action for quite some time. Much like yourself, in fact."

"Out of action? He'll fly again, won't he?" A horrifying fear wracked N'larion: his beloved brown might be grounded forever. He was a wingsecond – he and Mulujath *had* to be able to fly! His mind skittered away from that fear onto ways to reorganise the wing whilst the pair of them were healing. He needed to speak to L'tan...

Healer Reilen sighed and tapped his craft badge. "Healer, not dragonhealer, see? I understand your worry, but I can't give you answers." He softened the scold with a smile and turned his head to call out to one of the support staffers, who was working his way along the room, opening the glowbaskets. "Tegor, when you've done that will you please go to the dragonhealers and tell them that Wingsecond N'larion is awake."

The support staffer acknowledged with a swift nod and hurried to open the last of the glows. The healer turned his attention once more to N'larion. "Now, *I* need to talk about *you*."

"My shoulder..." There was still a dull ache of pain there, although the rest of the arm now felt fine.

"Yes, your shoulder." Reilen leaned forward in his chair – a posture that N'larion had seen him adopt when the news was bad. "The joint is intact, although by all rights it shouldn't be. You are lucky that you didn't lose the arm entirely."

N'larion gave a weak smile. He *hadn't* lost the arm – that was what mattered. That and how badly Mulujath was hurt. What was taking that sharding dragonhealer so long to arrive?

"There is significant nerve damage," continued Reilen. "We won't know the full extent for a sevenday or so, of course, but—"

"Nerve damage?" That couldn't be right – he could feel his arm all the way down to the fingertips. It brought a surge of pain in his upper arm, but his fingers curled into a fist on command. Well, almost a fist – the fingertips curled inwards at any rate. That was just the effect of the pain and the fellis and whatever numbweed they had slathered here and there, surely?

Reilen nodded. "Yes. I could tell you the names of the nerves, but they wouldn't mean anything to a non-healer. Suffice to say—"

"But I can feel my fingers..."

"Of course you can. Damaged I said, not destroyed." Reilen gave his friendliest reassuring-the-patient smile. "However you should be aware that full function may not return. Your arm may remain weak, perhaps loss of fine control with your fingers."

"May not?" N'larion fixed on the qualifier hungrily. Not a given then, this 'loss of fine control'.

"As I said, it will take at least a sevenday until we know the true picture. And even if our worst fears are confirmed, then a careful series of exercises may restore some more mobility."

Reilen continued and N'larion nodded at every hopeful and reassuring word. It was all a matter of time and exercises – drills to get him back to full health, just as the dragonhealers were bound to suggest drills to get Mulujath fighting fit again. He had no need to worry – determination and application would see them both through.

He and Mulujath wouldn't let Weyrleader L'tan's Wing down.

He and Mulujath wouldn't let L'tan's Wing down.



Kadanzer Weyr

Alternate Tenth Pass *Dragonriders of Pern*® Fanclub

www.kadanzer.org