
The Candidates' First Lecture

by Whitney Ware

The candidates are ushered into one of the weyrling lecture rooms and are directed by the Headwoman to take their seats. As they do so, a door behind a simple wooden desk at the front of the room opens, and a tall, powerfully built man with a wooden leg limps in. The shoulder knots on his worn leather flight jacket mark him, to the observant, as a brownrider and as the Weyrlingmaster. He sits down on an edge of the desk, watching the candidates file in. His blue-gray eyes are critical in a rugged, long-jawed face. A habitual scow rests on his narrow lips. The Weyrlingmaster studies this new clutch of candidates, and any twitchy or inattentive candidate is clearly noted for future attention.

Once all the candidates have found seating, the Weyrlingmaster begins to speak.

"Good evening, candidates," he says in a rough, low voice. "I am D'zan, rider of brown Yoseth and the Weyrlingmaster of Kadanzer. Some of us have met. Some of us haven't. If you're new to the Weyr, welcome to Kadanzer. If you're not -- sit down, shut up, and listen with both ears. Some of you have sat through this lecture before; pay attention this time around, and maybe this time you'll Impress."

One candidate laughs anxiously, as if the brownrider's dour attitude to be for entertainment. When he realizes no one else is laughing, he goes silent and slides nervous looks at his companions. D'zan stares at him for a moment, nonplussed. "Your pardon, sir," the candidate says at once, sounding meek. The Weyrlingmaster nods, then continues.

"First and foremost, understand that being Searched does not guarantee Impression. I don't care, nor do the dragons, how you were Searched or who Searched you. I've seen more than my share of candidates who were Searched by golds or bronzes left standing when the eggs are all hatched, while the candidate who'd been brought in by the green Search dragon walked off with the gold or the bronze dragonets. Nothing is guaranteed. Being weyrbred does not automatically entitle you to a dragon, just like not all harper-bred children can carry a tune. No one knows what it is that causes a dragonet to choose his or her rider. Predicting who will and will not Impress at a particular Hatching is like betting on racers at a Gather. You can wager as many marks as you dare, but you are never guaranteed a winner.

"To be accepted as a candidate, you must be in excellent physical and mental health. We do not accept unstable personalities -- dragonets are not mindhealers, and allowing a sick mind to Impress one is cruel to the dragonet and ultimately disruptive to the entire Weyr. We do not accept individuals with clear physical disabilities. A dragonrider

must be able to see, hear, and be mobile in order to properly care for their dragon and to be able to combat Threadfall. You must be between the ages of 15 and 21 to Impress a dragon. No candidates older or younger than these ages are accepted. No candidates will be accepted who have a proven criminal history. This is a Weyr, not a penal holding. If we discover that you have misled us on any of the above points, you will regret it. For your own well being, I would encourage you to be honest with us if you have not yet been. We will be observing you closely in the days to come, and if you have lied... we will know it.

"As a candidate at Kadanzer, you are under the observation of myself, my staff, and Headwoman Raecliffe. The Headwoman and her assistants, up until the time you Impress, will be your day-to-day supervisors. Raecliffe and her staff will assign you your daily chores. You have already been assigned your cot in the Candidates Barracks, and Raecliffe will have scheduled you for a Hatching gown fitting session sometime during the next several nights. This was already explained to you earlier, and I am only repeating it now because experience has taught us that being at the Weyr often seems to punch holes in a candidate's head, and the excitement of the experience may have made some of you lose your common sense.

"From now until the next Hatching, you are a drudge at this Weyr. I do not care what your previous rank in Craft or Hold were -- at Kadanzer, until you Impress on those hot Hatching Sands, you are a drudge. You will perform whatever chores you are assigned. You will perform them efficiently and without complaint. You will do your best at your assigned tasks. Shirking and loitering are not allowed. You will have rest times to in which to relax and make friends -- but when you are on duty, you are on duty. And any failure in that duty will be brought to my immediate attention."

D'zan paused for a moment, letting his last comment sink in before continuing. "Weyrfolk have the serious business of fighting Thread and preparing to fight Thread to concern ourselves with. We are not here to coddle you or play nursemaid to children. Your reward for misbehavior or dereliction of assigned duty is simple and irrevocable. You will be shipped back to whatever hold or crafthall you came from. You will not stand candidate on Kadanzer's sands. We do not have the time, personnel, or interest to deal with any problems you may bring with you when you are Searched. If you cannot pull your own weight here, and behave in a respectful fashion as you wait for your chance on the Hatching Sands, then that chance is forfeit. This is your only warning. Any misbehavior or shirking of your duties will result in your leaving the Weyr. I have full and complete authority to make that decision -- and I have been given cause to use that authority in the past. I will not hesitate to do so again, if any of you prove not to be of dragon-worthy mettle.

"In addition to your regular, assigned chores, my assistants and I will hold regular candidate classes with you between now and the Hatching. It will be our goal to ensure

that you are well prepared, emotionally and physically, for the Hatching. A badly prepared candidate is as dangerous to the dragonets as the dragonets are to him, and it is in the Weyr's best interests to make certain that a Hatching occurs without casualties. Most of these candidate classes will be held here in the secondary lecture hall. But there will be occasions when you will be escorted out to the Hatching Sands in order to familiarize yourself with the eggs. The number of visits, and the length of each visit, will depend on the queen who rules those Sands. I will not allow the queen to be disturbed. You will be required to wear your Hatching gowns for those visits, and it goes without saying that the eggs will be treated with the utmost care and discretion. Anyone failing to do so will certainly have a lesson to learn from me... and I'm sure several secondary lessons will await them as well, from the queen on the sands, from her rider, from the Weyrwoman, from the Weyrleader, and anyone else who wants a piece of sorry candidate hide.

"While you are a candidate at Kadanzer Weyr, you will be staying in the Candidate Barracks. Let us review, again, the rules and regulations of the barracks. First and foremost -- fighting is not allowed. If you want to brawl with a fellow candidate, you'll be shipped home to do it. I do not allow any sort of weapon in the Candidate Barracks, nor in the Weyrling Barracks, and for your tenure here as candidate and weyrling, such will be left in the care of the Headwoman. She will return them to you if you fail to Impress and decide to return home, or she will return them to you when you've graduated from the Weyrling Barracks into a private weyr.

"No pets other than firelizards are allowed in the barracks. None. I will allow no debate of this matter. First, barracks quarters are too tight for assorted livestock. Second, the Weyr's resources are too limited to waste on useless pets. Third, other barracks inhabitants may have allergies to, or deep-seated phobias of, what you might consider your beloved pet. And fourth... it's amazing how many people who have pets never clean up the shit their pets leave behind. Sharing the barracks with fifty or more candidates and their assorted firelizards will be difficult enough. Adding livestock of various species is beyond stupid. If you've been inconsiderate enough to bring a pet along with your baggage to the Weyr without the Headwoman's clearance, then I'll see to it that the beast is shipped home. Your other choice is the Feeding Grounds -- and anything you leave at the stable is potential dragon bait. Keep that in mind.

"You will be expected to keep your bunk in the barracks neat and well made during the times you are not actually sleeping in it. Your personal items are limited to only what can be fit into the trunk at the end of your cot -- and all personal items are to be kept in that trunk and not strewn around the barracks when not in use. Food and liquids are not allowed in the barracks -- they will attract vermin. You will take all of your meals in the Weyr dining hall at mealtimes. Under no circumstances are alcohol or any sort of medicinal drugs allowed in the barracks. If you need

medicine, you will take it in the Infirmary during the morning sick call. Any offense involving alcohol, drugs, or weapons will result in an immediate expulsion from this Weyr and a forfeiture of your Candidacy. Spot inspections will be made, and I have no compunction against impounding items or assigning extra duty chores to individuals who fail to measure up to standards.

"I can see from the expressions on some of your faces that some of you question these rules as being too harsh. Well, if you don't like them, if you feel you cannot live under these rules, dragonriders are waiting to return you to your home hold or hall. If you stay at Kadanzer and Impress at the next Hatching, you will live under similar rules for the next eighteen months as a weyrling. I am the Weyrlingmaster at this Weyr. It is not my job to coddle candidates. It is not my job to be your friend. I am here to train prospective candidates, and to teach new weyrlings how to survive against an element which is death incarnate for dragon, rider, and the whole of this planet. As a prospective candidate, you have the choice to make now -- have you got what it takes to be a candidate, to face the eggs currently hardening on the Hatching Sands? Have you got what it takes to succeed as a weyrling at Kadanzer Weyr? If you do, I look forward to seeing you take a stand before those eggs when they are ready to hatch. If you have doubts -- listen to them very seriously, make an honest decision, and do not be afraid or ashamed to catch a flight home."

D'zan rises, little hindered by his wooden leg. Most of the gathered candidates sit silent and staring, digesting what they've heard. Some are brazen enough to return D'zan's gaze, and the Weyrlingmaster makes a mental note of the ones who do so.

"That is all, candidates. The Headwoman will now assign you to chore sections, and assign duties. Perform them well."