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# What are Gold Mating Flights Like?

*by Lynne Brigant; November 2002 update*

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Golds are the most important dragons in a Weyr. Dragons have something of a hive mentality in that the queen dragon is the queen and her word is law. This applies to any gold, although of course the senior queen has precedence over all the others. A gold mating flight is of prime importance, even when it is a junior gold. The rider of the bronze dragon who catches the senior queen in her mating flight becomes Weyrleader until the next mating flight. There is no political benefit to catching any of the junior queens, beyond the fact that it bodes well for his chances next time the senior queen flies, but in spite of that, most activities within the Weyr will come to a halt when any gold rises to mate, even if it is only so that the riders whose dragons are not participating can wager on the outcome.

Only bronze dragons mate with queens. This is quite simply because the golds are the biggest, strongest dragons, with larger wingspan and more stamina than all of the others. Only the bronzes, who are the next closest in size, have any hope of catching her. The browns and blues know better than to even try (in most cases, the queen would be infuriated by their audacity should they make the doomed attempt).

Bronze dragons have a general idea as much as several days in advance when a gold is likely to rise to mate. A bronze will NEVER voluntarily sit out a gold mating flight, so if his rider wishes his dragon not to participate, he must take him away from the Weyr before the flight begins. Since they do know in advance, they will not even chase a green in the days before so that there is no chance they would be too tired to chase the gold. Neither a gold nor a green will ever rise to mate on a day when there is Thread as the instinctive need to fight Pern's ancient enemy overrides all other instincts.

When the gold's flight is imminent, the bronze dragons fly to the Feeding Grounds and blood a few kills. The protein-rich blood will give them the quick energy they will need, without weighing them down with the meat (the meat, incidentally is not wasted; after the gold has left the ground, the herder staff move in and salvage the slaughtered animals to be fed to those dragonets still too young to hunt their own food.) The bronzes then ring the Feeding Ground and wait for the queen.

Similar to a green flight, the queen's rider may or may not experience symptoms as much as several days in advance of the flight, including irritability or unusual hunger, thirst or lust feelings. Golds are extremely possessive in their mating heat, and they would turn furiously on any other gold who rose at the same time. But it

is also true that golds, like the smaller greens, broadcast their emotions on a very wide band, and as well as affecting any human within range, it is entirely possible that her heat may jog another gold into her own heat. It is therefore vitally important that the riders of all other gold dragons, even including one too young to mate, must take their beasts away from the Weyr as soon as they become aware that another gold is about to fly. The only exceptions are very young queens - less than one Turn of age - and a queen who is presently guarding a clutch of eggs on the Hatching Ground.

When the queen wakes, she is initially aware only of an intense hunger. She is usually far from her usual self at this point, and even if she is customarily of even temperament, she will probably be very irritable at this point. The rider MUST control her eating as, left to her own devices, she will angrily tear into several kills and consume the soft underbelly. Doing so would leave her too heavy to gain high altitude. Dragons mate on the wing, and are essentially falling as they do it, so they need to gain enough altitude to be able to finish the mating in time to break off before they hit the ground. Furthermore, the longer the flight lasts, the larger the clutch and the more the likelihood of bronzes and a queen egg. Therefore, ideally, the queen and her partner should begin the mating process many thousands of feet up in the air so that they have a long time before it would be necessary to break apart.

Once the hot blood begins to pour down her throat, the gold begins to become aware of her mating heat and is less resistant to her rider's commands. At the same time, her color will visibly change. Her hide will appear to glow, signalling the imminent flight. The glow is caused by the excretion of certain substances that simply make the hide glisten as though wet. This greatly increases her sexual attractiveness, but it is not by any means a blinding sight. The queen has an instinctive need to be caught by the biggest and best of her pursuers; she knows that this will result in the best clutch and the best outcome for the Weyr. Furthermore, she IS bigger and stronger than any of them, so she can outfly them without much difficulty. This is why she taunts them with their unworthiness and drags out the pre-flight sequence for as long as possible. (Note: the same is NOT true of greens, who know perfectly well that their mating activity is purely recreational and are, besides, completely incapable of outflying their prospective mates.) By the time the queen is in the air, she has become aware of her own need and desire to mate, but she knows that need will be fulfilled; she is quite happy to wait. Usually what will happen is that the lesser bronzes will drop out of the chase once they get too far behind. Once only two or three are left in the running (either because the others have dropped out entirely, or because they are far enough back that they have no chance), the queen usually has made a choice as to whom she wishes to be caught by. This choice is often affected by her rider's preferences, although not always. She may allow herself to be caught by that dragon,

or he or perhaps even one of the others may catch her by a fluke of luck of a bit of trick flying.

We can only really speculate on the effects on the humans involved since nothing in the real world even comes close. A gold mating flight can last anywhere from one to three hours before the gold is caught, and the effect of that on those participating in the chase is incredibly intense. The riders involved will be in full fight-or-flight adrenaline rush for several hours, muscles tensed, hearts pounding, attention totally focused on the flight. It may not be like running a marathon, but it's probably like fighting Thread in the most dangerous and stressful conditions for the same number of hours.

Dragons mate in the air and only stop once they get dangerously close to the ground. Assuming a nice high flight terminating five miles up in the air and further assuming that the mating dragons will fall at 1000 feet per minute (about as fast as a human with a paraglider... dragons are bigger than humans of course, but they are flying creatures and their wings have to be much bigger than paragliders) that's full-on intense sex for 25 minutes, and presumably longer since the riders' own hormones will be triggered, plus their dragons will still be in intimate rapport with each other even after the physical mating has stopped.

However, the sex is only part, and not even the major part, of what is happening. Every rider whose dragon is in the chase is almost totally overwhelmed by the full hormonal rut of a giant predator, and has only limited awareness of what is going on around them in their physical environment. Once the coupling actually begins, the riders involved simply lose their identity and effectively become their dragons. This loss of identity is the only thing that will explain the fact that gender and personal feelings, some of the deepest human instincts, are totally irrelevant. Strong or weak will just doesn't even enter into it. This experience shouldn't really be compared to sex; it's more like a massive hallucinogenic drug trip.

Riders will almost certainly not even be aware of each other's identities during the actual mating flight. If riders were able to be aware of each other during mating, we'd have many more dragon deaths as people panicked from the realization that they were in the middle of having sex with their worst enemy, or to someone of a gender that they normally can't stand to make love with.

Bronzeriders who lose the flight are going to be in serious need, not to mention being in rapport with a frustrated predator whose need is even more serious. Some, who are inexperienced and of average willpower, may find themselves blindly having sex with the first person to present him/herself. Most, having a few flights under their belt and or having strong will, should be able to choose who they have sex with, and even put off the sex for a few minutes while they walk around and look for someone, but only in extreme circumstances should they be able to go without the sex at all. Even then it should be recognized that this choice is needlessly cruel to one's dragon, who is

denied even the vicarious release that his rider's sex provides.

The winning riders don't have any such choice. Once the pair come out of rapport with their dragons, they will have been through the wringer. The effects of the dragonlust will leave them drained of hormones and neurotransmitters. The physical exertions will have their blood sugar at a low ebb. They will be sore in tender places, and very likely bruised from each others' grip. They will also be affected by the exhaustion of their dragons.

Most people would fall asleep even before coming out of rapport; the human brain simply isn't built to take this sort of massive hormone and endorphin flow. Unusual individuals might stay awake long enough to say a few foggy words, and recognize each other, but I think this should be the exception and any story containing this should make clear that it is unusual. Even if riders do stay awake long enough to come out of rapport, they should not be able to do anything else except possibly in an emergency, and even then they won't have enough adrenalin left to do much.

Sounds like fun, huh?