





EPILOGUE



As the Weyr quickened with activity in the early hours of an autumn morning, a single bronze dragon watched from his ledge in unblinking, unreadable silence.

He watched, but not alone. All around him, dragons emerged from their weyrs, shaking out glistening, iridescent wings of blue and brown and green and bronze. By the Star Stones a lone dragon stood vigil, emerald against the brilliant blue sky. In the Bowl a tithe caravan trundled to a halt.

“Watching again?”

The dragon did not turn to regard his companion, but moved his head slightly to allow himself a better view. A golden form, still graceful in pregnancy, veered towards the Hatching ground, and vanished.

Epherineth could hardly wait for T'kamen to vault astride. The bronze sprang from their ledge, letting the air catch under his wings, riding the wind. A chorus of voices questioned the urgency of their lead male, but he didn't reply. The entrance to the Hatching ground loomed, but Epherineth did not check his speed. The great bronze slipped through with a wingspan to spare.

On the hot sand below, Shimpeth reared up, flaring her wings, uttering a strange cry somewhere between distress and satisfaction. Respectfully, Epherineth landed at a distance, taking to notice of the heat, all his attention fixed on the queen.

Shimpeth calmed, settling back to the ground to rest, breathing in short pants, and rolled the first of her glowing, gleaming, soft-shelled eggs onto a cushioning pile of sand.

Epherineth roared for joy, the silent bronze finding his voice at last. He roared as Shimpeth drew herself up to lay a second egg, the second of his progeny, the second egg that contained his future, the future of Madellon, the future of Pern. Epherineth roared until his lungs burned and his throat was sore, and the walls of the Hatching cavern rang with pure jubilation.

The past was gone, the present would pass, but the future stretched ahead, and it was his, all his.