



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

He watched alone, as always: few dragons chose weyrs so far up the steep walls of the Bowl, not with plenty of lower-level, better-equipped caves to choose from. Empty caverns yawned in every direction around him. He liked it that way. He liked to spend his mornings in solitude.

“Watching again?”

The dragon did not turn to regard his companion, but moved his head slightly to allow himself a better view of the killing grounds. Far below, a golden form dived gracefully to dash the life from her prey, and the bronze watched, silent and inscrutable, as the queen broke her fast. He watched the teeth gleam white and then red as they rent the flesh, the muscles move fluidly under the shining hide, the sinuous tail lash in an unconscious reflection of the instincts awoken by the feed.

And he watched the burly bronze launch from the Weyrleader’s ledge to join the queen: not to feed, but to protect.

The quiet dragon’s expression didn’t change as he regarded the other bronze, but his claws flexed unconsciously, biting into the worn and scarred rock of his weyr ledge.

The harsh grate of talon against stone could not possibly have carried to the senior bronze below, but nonetheless, Pierdeth lifted his head to fix his observer with an arrogant stare.

Shimpath fed on, oblivious, as the two males locked eyes over her head in silent conflict.

Finally, Pierdeth tossed his head back in a challenging bugle, daring his opponent to respond. The chorus of inquiring calls that echoed off the walls of the Weyr meant nothing to either dragon: the querulous voices of lesser colours questioning the roar of their lead male. But the silence that remained in their aftermath seemed louder by far than those cries. Epherineth, the quiet bronze, simply watched: silent and motionless.

His superiority unchallenged, Pierdeth's gaze returned to the queen, following her every movement until she returned to her ledge, heavy with food.

T'kamen touched his dragon's fore-claw, bringing Epherineth back to himself, but like the dragon himself, the lean rider said nothing.

Epherineth gathered himself, shaking his head to ease the tension in the long muscles of his sleek neck. *Not yet*, was all he would reveal. *Not yet*.