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# Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

(The nature of divorce & marriage on Pern)

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"Divorce" is not really a modern concept; as long as there have been marriages, there have been ways of ending marriages (short of death). Understanding how marriage and divorce work on Pern is a matter of examining the ways in which the institution of marriage is actually important there, which also requires an understanding of how it is different from its most familiar forms in the world of the reader.

Pern has no religion, and this is one of the great complicating factors in any consideration of marriage and divorce practices in the real world. Societies in which marriage is merely an economic convenience have tended to be a lot more lenient towards the dissolution of those contracts, than ones which tie marriage to religious vows. This is not to say that the dissolution of marriage is EASY, when religion is removed from the picture. It usually behooves a society to make the breaking of such a contract somewhat difficult.

The matter of marriage, and consequently of divorce, is further complicated on Pern by the separate traditions of Holders, Crafters, or Weyrfolk.



## MARRIAGE IN THE HOLDS

Holder marriage is probably the most rigid form of the institution on Pern -- for the Holders is it not merely an economic union, but a dynastic one, for the express purpose of creating alliances, gaining land/dowries, and producing children recognized as legitimate. Holders are VERY concerned with Bloodlines, and with who may have the right by Blood to succeed to a Hold.

Harpers usually conduct the marriage ceremony. In this capacity, they preside over and direct the ritual, and they serve as a formal witness to the marriage contract. Further, their participation is practical, in that the Harpcraft independently keeps meticulous Records of Hold Bloodlines (though in practice, every Lord will have his own copies of such records). Harpers record the marriage for posterity. In the Holds, it would be possible to conduct a marriage without the participation of a Harper -- a marriage would be considered perfectly legal if conducted by a Lord, or a minor Holder, so long as it was clear that the proper ratification had been obtained (see below). But in practice, having a

Harper conduct the ceremony is the favored tradition, and it would be unusual to do without it.

Outside of the heavily politicized marriages of the Lord Holders and minor Holders, the common folk generally imitate the traditions of their leaders. Marriage is a recognition of a partnership made for mutual cooperation, a pooling of resources towards the survival of the partnership and whatever family it produces. Commoners may have their own minor dynastic issues, depending on where they are in the social scale (whether they hold property for a Holder or Lord, or have charge of possessions or resources, the control of which they wish to secure).

The role of men in holder society appears in the books to be roughly analogous to that of men in pre-industrial Europe, with the man being the master of his house (holding), with most of the rights associated with that. His wife seems to become his property, and his children are regarded as his property as well. His rights appear to encompass the right to subject wife and children to corporal punishment -- while not all men regard it as palatable, there is nothing particularly unusual in Pernese society about a man who beats his wife. This is still true in Kadanzer's Tenth Pass Pern.

Unsurprisingly, men have far more power in the holds to initiate divorce than women will. It is *possible* that a woman could make the demand and see the process through, but she would have to have a reason deemed appropriate by her community, and she would almost certainly need to have powerful and sympathetic allies in her own right (blood kin, usually). Our ability to imagine the circumstances in which a woman could demand a divorce is complicated by the necessity of figuring out what would constitute an acceptable reason for the demand. Adultery on the husband's part is accepted in the society, sometimes encouraged. A certain level of what we would call physical abuse towards both wife and children is also condoned.

It is more common for a man to divorce his wife in order to take another. A man may want to get rid of a barren wife, or one whom he claims to be mentally or temperamentally unstable, or incompetent to run his hold. A man may also wish to divorce a wife who has been convicted of a crime (murder, for example). If her punishment does not include execution, divorce would be a way for a man to disentangle himself and his children from her, and to preserve the bloodline's honor. (This also would be a societally acceptable reason for a woman to demand a divorce from a husband.)

A complicating factor, of course, is that at the highest ranks, amongst Lords and Holders, men are able to have more than one legal wife at a time. Frequently this happens when a first wife proves barren, but for political reasons it is not expedient for the Lord to divorce her (if, for example, his marriage with her represents an alliance with her home Hold and her relatives that he wants to keep). While arranging for legal second wives is a complicated matter, it does serve as a viable alternative. But it is not a practice that one finds outside of the highest ranks.

All marriages involving members of Lordly families must be ratified by the full Conclave, which body confirms that the man may marry the woman (Bloodlines are checked to avoid consanguinity). Typically, the Conclave convenes on the day of the marriage itself, but in practice, this is usually only the case for the most prominent of marriages (that of a current Lord or his designated Heir). The full Conclave is required for such proceedings – a quorum is not sufficient. Every Lord in the Conclave must be given the opportunity to make comment on the marriage and its agreements, and to vote. In cases where the full complement of Lords is not present, proxy votes for the absent Lords must have been obtained beforehand and cast by their designated representatives amongst those present, preferably backed by their written statement and their seal.

The Conclave formally legitimizes the marriage's potential offspring (in practice, all children of a legally recognized marriage are deemed legitimate, and this is merely an official rubber-stamp), and more importantly, ratifies the potential offsprings' eligibility for the succession in either or both of the parents' Holds.

In most cases, a marriage's offspring will be eligible to inherit within the husband's holding; but in some cases there may be good reason to say that the offspring will also have succession rights in the Bloodline of the mother's family's Hold as well. This is sometimes necessary and advantageous, in cases where a Lord has produced few children, or many daughters but few or no sons. The Conclave always wants a Hold to have a good choice of potential successors to a Lord when the time comes for a change, and it recognizes the reality that child mortality is relatively high on Pern.

Lords are supposed to have large numbers of offspring because doing so plays the odds. This strategy recognizes that life on Pern is more precarious than in our own world. The strategy is always aimed at having enough children to ensure that some of the boys have a good chance of reaching adulthood; and then, the hope is that at least one, and hopefully more than one, will prove competent in the role of potential future Lord. In some cases, therefore, it is wise for a Lord to marry his daughter off to another Lord or minor Holder, but to accept the ruling of Conclave that his daughter's potential sons may one day be considered in his own Hold's succession, as well as in that of her husband's Hold.

This dual eligibility is a matter usually negotiated by the two parties prior to bringing the marriage before the Conclave. In some circumstances, however, the Conclave could impose dual eligibility even if the family of the woman had not agreed to it beforehand. This is a case in which the Conclave's majority judgment of what is best may take precedent over the wishes of an individual Lord; although, it is an option that would be employed rarely. This tension between each Lord's autonomy and the Conclave's judgment always exists, though in practice, the individual Lord's wishes for his own holding are honored except in unusual circumstances. This extends to honoring

the Lord's choice in whom he names Heir – but it is wise to remember that in practice, it is the Conclave who will ratify the succession of the next Lord once the old one is dead, and they may (although again, rarely) overturn the claim of a Lord's designated Heir if they feel there is sufficient reason (and if the Conclave can muster enough votes).

It must still be stressed that normally, the Conclave does not override the individual Lord's wishes, and does not override marriage agreements – not least because each individual Lord on the Conclave is interested in protecting his own autonomy, and would not wish to set a possibly dangerous precedent.

The Conclave, finally, also bears witness to any other agreements made between the man and the wife's family. All divorces at this rank, therefore, also must be ratified by the Conclave.

In the case of minor Holders under a Lord, there are still dynastic issues. The ratification of minor Hold marriages, however, are made by the Lord. He may do so within a conclave with his minor Holders, if he holds one regularly, or he may do so arbitrarily, on his own, as the situation arises. The only exception is when such a marriage involves one party with the Blood of a major (Lordly) Hold and when the question of succession of a Lordly Hold comes into play. (For example, if one of the Lord's daughters is married to a minor Holder from a neighboring Lordship, there would need to be a formal ruling on whether her potential children may be considered in her father's succession.)

If there are no children involved, a divorce would be easier to obtain. Having children to secure the Bloodline and the Hold's succession is obviously one of the most important goals of Holder marriage, and if the marriage fails to produce children, then it has failed a basic function. But, as mentioned above, there may be other clauses that were negotiated at the time of the marriage – political or economic alliances between the man's Hold and the wife's family's Hold. The dilemma facing both husband and wife in that situation is that the dissolution of the marriage may be seen as the dissolution of the agreements that went along with it – and there may be strong reasons for either party to want to protect those agreements.

A husband therefore may not wish to let his wife "escape", or may be faced with having to keep her in some fashion in order to avoid insulting her Blood relatives. If the wife's family received some important benefits through the marriage, she in turn may feel pressured to stay in the marriage and not to jeopardize those benefits.

Children complicate matters slightly, but not much. Children are considered the "property" of the husband/Lord, not of the woman. Except in the most extreme and unusual of circumstances, a woman obtaining a divorce would lose custody of her children. There would follow formal declarations on the part of the Conclave that the woman forfeits all future rights to the succession of the Hold, and so on.

There is a great deal of social pressure within the Holds (where arranged marriage, rather than love- or even

friendship-matches, are most common) for people to stay married, and a lot more stigma of scandal and social impropriety for women who are divorced. Everything we see of Holders in the books (even in the more "modernist", progressive era of the Ninth Pass) suggests that if a man doesn't want his wife any more, he'd have more luck killing her and trying to make it look like an accident, than divorcing her; and a woman who initiated or was the victim of a divorce would likely find herself a social outcast, even back in her home Hold, where she'd be considered a failure. And this certainly is the case on Kadanzer's Pern.

Only very great problems would make a Hold couple consider divorce – excessive violence in the marriage (even by Pernese standards); mental illness; incompetence; adultery on the part of the woman; criminality. If the couple does not actively *hate* each other and there are no other overriding reasons, the social stigma of divorce would probably convince them to stick it out and make the best of things.

Men would have more leverage if they are trying to get an heir, and can't with their present wife. But on Pern, a man's heir doesn't NEED to be "legitimate" (born within a legal marriage); he can sleep around, take mistresses, and father a kid with someone else. He is not even obligated to make his wife's child his Heir -- on Pern, Holds technically choose whoever is best for the job, although in practice, this does frequently devolve onto a choice of one of the man's legitimate sons, if not necessarily of his first-born. But it is also possible, when the time comes to confirm a new Lord or new Holder, for the "best man for the job" to be judged to be the old Lord's brother, or one of his brother's sons, rather than one of his own.

If the man MUST divorce, particularly for reasons that cannot be laid to the fault of the wife, he is probably obligated to give a good divorce settlement to her (in order to offset the appearance of disgrace) – but it is difficult to imagine a case of divorce where the woman is not in some way blamed for the marriage's failure. In Hold divorces, the man is more likely to keep the rights (his is the Hold Blood, usually, so everything would still belong to him), and the woman to get no settlement at all except her freedom to marry again, if she can get anyone.

Because the Holds have the most expectations of the institution of marriage, and the most rules and social mores regarding it, holders are also likely have a tendency for their expectations to come into conflict with the less rigid social/cultural practices of the Crafts and Weyrs. Holders who go to live at the Weyr find their deeply-entrenched expectations challenged, and may have a difficult time adjusting to the Weyr's social rules. Marriage in the Holds is so freighted with extra baggage, however, that it's equally possible that individual holders are glad to escape its strictures.



## MARRIAGE IN THE CRAFTS

Crafters certainly have marriage, but it has different needs and purposes than the marriages of the Holds. Crafters are not really individual entrepreneurs; either they live in the communal circumstances of a Hall, or else they live at a Hold or a Weyr to which they are assigned and from which they are guaranteed their living as part of the terms of their assignment. There is less urgency, therefore, for a Crafter to marry as a matter of economic security. Furthermore, the Crafts are no more dynastic than the Weyrs are.

Crafthalls don't usually have their own resident Harper (unless they are attached to a Hold that has one), so two people within a Hall might take their vows in front of the Hall's Craftmaster. If it is the case of a crafter assigned to a Hold, the vow would likely be witnessed by the Harper, or perhaps the Lord or Holder, especially in cases in which a Crafter is marrying a local holder.

Divorce is more common amongst Crafters than Holders, because the stakes in the marriage are less intrinsically socially important (i.e. there are usually few outside social demands requiring the bond to be kept intact). The nuts and bolts of it require going before the same authority that witnessed the marriage, or an authority of similar power, to ratify its dissolution. This authority can also serve as a mediator to help in the division of common possessions, and the question of custody of children.

Marriage may confer a greater sense of belonging to the local community for an assigned Crafter. But if the marriage ends in divorce, the effect may be the opposite, leading to ostracization of the outsider/crafter.

Ironing out the expectations of both parties following a divorce would be important, because of the relative mobility of Crafters -- a Crafter may leave an assigned post and therefore leave the community in which the marriage happened. If a married Crafter is transferred away, his wife and children of course would go with him. But if he is divorced, she would likely stay behind, and the status of the children might be in question.

While the divorce may have included some kind of economic settlement between the two parties (with an eye towards obligating the Crafter ex-husband to continue to provide advantages to the children of the marriage, even if he should marry again and have more children by a second wife, for example), a holder ex-wife might reasonably fear that such support would end or be drastically reduced if the Crafter leaves the Hold for an assignment far away. These are issues that would be considered carefully during the course of obtaining a divorce.

There are some cases in which Crafter marriages are complicated by Holder customs and requirements – chiefly when either the Crafter himself or his intended wife comes from a ranking (Lordly, or minor Hold) family. While the Crafter himself may no longer be eligible in his Bloodline's succession due to the complicating matter of his allegiance to his Craft, his family would consider whether to grant his potential offspring eligibility in the Bloodline's succession.

The same would be true of, say, a Lord's daughter marrying a Crafter.

Crafters who are assigned to a Weyr are in an unusual position – depending on their circumstances and outlook, they may become permanent members of the community, or else they may consider themselves transient. The more transient they think themselves, the more likely they will be to wish to adhere to their own marriage customs, rather than abide by the customs of the Weyr.

A crafter in residence at a Weyr should expect a certain degree of "when in Rome" to apply – if he or she forms a relationship with a rider, or especially with a nonrider, the crafter should not expect a marriage by the definitions of their own customs. On the other hand, a crafter assigned to a Weyr might bring a spouse with them; or they might, in the course of their time at the Weyr, form an attachment to an outside craftbred or holdbred, whom they might marry and bring to live at the Weyr. This is one of the main exceptions to the partnership customs of the Weyrs, made possible by unique status of assigned crafters.



## MARRIAGE AND PARTNERSHIPS IN THE WEYR

Weyrfolk don't really have "marriage", as such. Dragonfolk instead have "weyrmating", which isn't considered to have the same connotations of permanence. This cultural variation came about because of several factors.

First, early Weyrfolk recognized the ways in which their bonds with dragons affected the kinds of accommodations they needed to make in their behaviors and expectations. Further, the way life is structured in the Weyr, and the way it survives, makes the kinds of issues often settled by marriage contract less important. Weyr leadership is not hereditary. Weyrs usually do not have to sustain their own population because they have a steady influx of immigrants from outside. The Weyr is run in a communal way that minimizes the stress on individuals to provide for their own survival.

People respect weyrmatings (whether they came about by choice, or whether they are prompted by mating flight), if the participants in the weyrmating give indication that they want it respected. But there seems to be no universal tradition of taking vows that keep partners together (partners may take such vows individually and privately, but there seems to be no larger tradition of it within the Weyrs). A weyrmating is not considered a legal contract. Due to the realities of mating flights, Weyrfolk must recognize that sexual relations, and even perhaps the parentage of children, are matters outside of the consideration of what "loyalty" between committed partners may mean. An even greater difference between weyrmatings and non-Weyr marriages is that the former may as easily recognize same-sex pairings as heterosexual pairings.

Non-rider support-staff in the Lower Caverns are not necessarily as affected by draconic needs as the riders, but

many of them do enter into relationships with riders, and further, the needs and habits of dragons and riders has historically been the strongest influence on the shaping of Weyr culture. So, like their commoner counterparts in holder culture, these folk traditionally reflect the cultural habits of the riders.

This does not mean that all non-riders in the Weyr, or even all dragonriders, have given up the desire to have formalized, recognized relationships. What it does mean is that residents of the Weyr community must adjust their expectations. Desire for formalization would be satisfied by witnessed exchanges of vows and perhaps the exchange of tokens like rings.

A further complication is that while the Weyrs have a distinct culture with a long-standing history, they are communities that are constantly being acted-upon by the importation of cultural practices, via Candidates who are Searched and brought into the community. While accommodating draconic needs becomes inevitable and imperative, many riders still retain the desires and expectations of their cultural heritage. By and large, these immigrants into Weyr society simply have to learn to play by Weyr "rules", which includes adherence to Weyr custom. Holder-style marriages in a Weyr will be extremely rare, and frowned upon if undertaken by a rider, because the expectations of holder marriage conflict with the realities of a rider's life.

When it comes time for a partnership in the Weyr to end, therefore, little action is formally necessary. As both members of any partnership are likely still members of the Weyr community, neither really has to worry how he or she will live. Evidence in the books is that children are frequently fostered or taken care of in a communal way, as well, so "custody" is unlikely to be a problem. Disputes over common property are likely taken to a mediator (again, a duty traditionally filled by a Harper; but basically can be performed by any authority respected by both parties). The Weyr hierarchy provides obvious means for appeals of grievances. Partnerships are easily dissolved mere by public declaration.



Each of the segments of Pernese society has marriage and divorce traditions that go back centuries. While these traditions are shaped by the different needs of each segment of society, over time, the traditions come to stand alone as something that helps to *define* each segment of society as well. And, each segment has a tendency to view its own traditions as correct, and even moral. The Pernese do not automatically appreciate the underlying cultural forces that cause their traditions to be different. Thus, far from promoting understanding of each others' lifestyle, these differences in tradition are the basis for perpetuating misunderstandings, particularly between Hold and Craft versus the Weyr.

Crafter marriage is similar enough to Holder marriage that the two coexist fairly easily. Holder marriage, the institution with the greatest degree of formality, is viewed as the “most proper”. But Holders understand that while Crafters do not require the same degree of formality, their tradition of marriage is formal enough to be regarded as proper. Holders must respect Crafters as a high-ranking elite. But, Crafter mobility may incline Holders to view Crafters as somewhat fickle in loyalty, which extends to viewing them as less reliable marriage partners, on average. Crafters in turn may regard Holder marriages as stifling, and designed to entrap/imprison. But these differences are not so great as to cause serious issues between the two groups.

The greater difference between Weyr tradition and Holder/Crafter marriage is what causes the most difficulty. Neither Holders nor Crafters who live outside the Weyr understand the driving force of draconic need that shapes Weyr culture. Therefore, the Weyr’s rejection of marriage traditions in favor of less formalized, or entirely unformalized partnerships appears to be a capricious choice aimed at avoiding the “proper” responsibilities and benefits that come with marriage. Conversely, the weyrbred regard the Holder institution of marriage (which is considered to be the defining one) as stifling and entrapping, and further, irrelevant to the lives that weyrfolk lead. Holder and Crafter opinion regarding Weyr partnerships as immoral and improper is exacerbated by the Weyr’s willingness to recognize and give equal respect to partnerships between same-sex couples, a situation that would never be found in the traditions and institutions outside of the Weyr.

These deeply-rooted differences of opinion, and clash of traditions, contribute to the tension that exists between the Weyr and the Holds and Crafts. The Weyr bears the brunt of dealing with this tension, because of the necessity of welcoming a constant influx of holdbred and craftbred candidates, who bring with them their own cultural expectations and biases.

Holders and Crafters who cannot adapt to, or at least respect Weyr lifestyles and traditions are unlikely to remain in the Weyrs for long, though. While these traditions are deeply rooted and ingrained within a person according to the tradition in which he or she was raised, it is not impossible for individuals to adapt to and even come to prefer different traditions than the one that they were raised to regard as “normal”.



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