
Love Me, Love My Dragon

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Odd isn't it, that dragonriders can so easily be unpopular on Pern? After all, these men and women are meant to be heroes, yet it doesn't take much for the ordinary Pernese to be indifferent to downright hostile about them.

So, what's wrong with these noble, proud riders? The first thing is obviously Jealousy. Although life in the Weyrs is harder than most ordinary folks would credit, riders get the best of everything. Imagine the hardships some holders undergo Turn in, Turn out, only for the best of their crops to go to the distant Weyrs as part of their Lord's tithe, while their own families do without. In exchange for these goods, the Holders get protection from Thread for 50 Turns out of every 250. Or in terms of the people on the ground, during a Pass, once or twice every month at the height of a Pass! The rest of the time, riders are seen to be lounging around their Weyrs, occasionally flitting about (hunting their beasts on Holders' livestock when they wish), expect total deference from any Holders that they meet and apparently seem to be having endless sex as the innumerable green dragons always seem to be rising to mate.

Now the last point might partially explain why riders are unpopular. Disapproval of sex (particularly sex which takes no account of the gender of the participants) might mean that people see riders as being immoral; however holders are used to their Lords having the right to have sex with any female in their area who takes their fancy, and it's hardly likely that many holders would be more tolerant of being ordered out of their own wife's bed to make way for their Lord than they would be about distant Weyrfolk getting up to various activities of this nature!

There must be more reasons why people can become so ambivalent about riders so quickly. After all, in the 20th Century, people generally don't despise the Army, even though they don't actually go to war for more than about 10% of the time (added up over the centuries), and even despite stories about what some soldiers get up to that makes excessive sex in the Weyrs seem positively minor!

So what are riders like, as far as the average Pernese is concerned? The first thing to note is the theme through the books that there's something "different" about dragonriders. Even when they're not wearing their rank cords, people seem to know who the riders are, even when they didn't spot them with their dragons (and when they don't have obvious Threadscars to show their rider status).

Impression is what makes them different. Young men and women make a lifelong sensory bond with an alien

species and from that moment forward, no relationship is as important as that rider's relationship with his or her dragon. This could be deeply disturbing to people who knew that individual very well before Impression. Families, close friends, and even spouses are suddenly relegated to a secondary role in that person's life. The rider effectively becomes obsessed by their dragon, which also seems to change them in some mysterious way. Small wonder that many riders seem to lose contact with their families and few relationships seem to survive Impression. Any new relationships formed after Impression have to be based around the understanding that a rider's relationship with his or her dragon is THE most important thing in their lives.

The nearest analogy on 20th Century Earth would be the disturbing change that some people can undergo if they get suddenly and deeply involved with a fringe religion. Their friends and families are suddenly secondary to that person's new-found relationship with God. The person changes personality, drops previous interests, talks endlessly about their personal change, has a strange and fanatical gleam in their eye when they talk about their beliefs, and mysteriously ceases to suffer from acne.

Without the religious element, riders must undergo a similar transformation. Nothing matters other than the health and well-being of their draconic companions. If conversation gets around to their dragons, they can talk endlessly about their friends.

There isn't time for old friendships and interests and their active life and good diet probably assists in a physical transformation too. Stammers can vanish overnight. To other riders, these changes are normal and, like people in any closed society, they see other riders as an endlessly varied group of people with a wide range of interests and experiences. To nonriders, however they probably sound and look as disconcertingly alike as any gathering of 2,000 Moonies looks to us today.

So a relative Impressing a dragon is probably an event tinged with sadness for a family as well as with happiness. Happiness that their relative now has a high status and a companion who will give a level of comfort that that person has never known before, yet sadness that that person will never again be the person that they once knew.

To the Pernese who don't have close relatives in the Weyrs, they are a mysterious closed group, who don't seem to live like ordinary people, with normal interests and conversation. If it wasn't for their status, the welcome that riders on Search would receive from many places would probably be similar to ours when confronted with glassy-eyed people on our doorsteps trying to sell us religion.