
Sexual Morality on Pern

by Lynne Brigant

updated by Ron Swartzendruber

Green dragons rise to mate up to four times a year, and there are somewhat in excess of 250 adult green dragons at Kadanzer. As you can appreciate, therefore, green mating flights are VERY common, happening virtually every day, if not several times a day.

A rider ALWAYS responds to his or her dragon's mating flight by having sex with the rider of the other dragon. The link to one's dragon is at such a deep level, that it would be impossible not to be overwhelmed by the dragon's strongly broadcast feelings at that time. Even if the rider of the other dragon was of the same sex and your persona is strongly opposed to homosexuality, he or she would find themselves having homosexual sex regardless. They might have a problem with it afterwards, but during the flight, they will not even be aware that they have a problem with the idea. Homosexuality is common and freely accepted at the Weyr. Any anti-gay behavior will earn the serious displeasure of the Weyrwoman and will be dealt with promptly. At Kadanzer, we do not permit mating flight stand-ins.

Jealousy and other potentially destructive feelings could lead to serious problems in a Weyr. Therefore, to head off any problems before they happen, dragonriders are encouraged to engage freely in casual sexual activity (heterosexual or homosexual as they prefer), including outside of mating flights. Just to make life easier, there are no dangerous sexually transmitted diseases in Pern. Unexpected pregnancies are also not a problem, as there is no shame attached to having an illegitimate child in the Weyr (entirely different from the attitude outside the Weyr) and potential foster mothers abound. Greenriders, however, often abort before they ever realize they are pregnant due to dropping in and out of *between* so frequently.

Casual sex, therefore, is the normal, expected way of things in the Weyr. Even weyrmatings may very well be somewhat casual and may break up or get back together without a lot of hoopla. Marriage is rare, and the Weyrwoman will never permit two dragonriders to marry.

Weyrlings are not permitted to engage in any sexual activity until their dragons are six months old as the young dragon is too immature to be able to deal with the emotions generated by their riders, to whom they are inextricably linked. After that time, however, sexual activity is not only allowed, it is encouraged, although weyrlings are required to limit their involvement to other weyrlings, and not become involved with senior riders. It is NOT a good idea to be a virgin for your first mating flight, and since many greenriders are hold- or craftbred, where premarital sex is a huge no-no, active encouragement to discard these prejudices is given.

In the holds and crafts, on the other hand, things are the exact opposite. The stability and safety of society, family, and children are all-important, taking precedence over any considerations of personal freedom or individual rights. The accepted standard of sexual morality are quite puritanical. A young woman is expected to be a virgin until her wedding night, and if it were discovered at that point that she wasn't, the disgrace would be terrible. In most holds a husband would be within his rights to have a non-virginal bride beaten and tossed out of hold or hall in disgrace, or perhaps even killed, with little in the way of repercussion. (In practice, the worst consequences are usually meted out by higher-ranking families, as the purity of the bloodline is more important to them than to commoners.) Her father would be terribly shamed by the situation, and IF she was permitted back into her father's hold or hall, she would probably be treated little better than a drudge, the lowest of the low, not trusted with any responsibilities.

A girl who gets pregnant out of wedlock would be in the same position. Worse, even, because the presence of the child would be a constant, visible reminder of her shame. If the man who got her pregnant was unmarried, he would shortly find himself in a "shotgun wedding" with her, though that would do little to alleviate the disgrace. He would most likely be stripped of any rank, but would still have all the duties of a husband, and if he tried to leave the marriage he would be treated as any runaway husband (see below). The child, also, would suffer terribly, as the label of "bastard" would bar him or her from all sorts of opportunities, including entering a craft, making a good marriage and the like. Knowing that these sorts of consequences await, girls are a lot less likely to succumb to temptation, and boys are not nearly as likely to expect to be able to get laid outside of marriage as is the norm in 20th century Earth. (Oops, I guess that's 21st century now - sounds weird, doesn't it?)

A married woman is highly unlikely to have extra-marital affairs. Her fate if discovered would be the same shame and public disgrace as that of the unmarried non-virgin. Having said that of course, human nature being what it is, many people will still engage in extra-marital affairs. They just know what the consequences will be, and are likely to go to great lengths to keep their activities hidden.

One big exception is those with power, namely Lord Holders and the like. A Lord Holder is entirely likely to believe that he has the right to do as he wishes, and he will often have mistresses or perhaps even more than one wife. Having the illegitimate child of a Lord is not anything like as shameful as any other kind of bastard, as the Pernese have a high level of respect for "the Blood" and even a half-Blood is due respect. The mother of a half-Blood, or the cast-off mistress of a Lord is not nearly as disgraced as any other non-virgin unmarried girl, as having caught the attention of the Lord is not at all a bad thing. Besides, a half-decent Lord will make good arrangements for his ex-mistresses and her placement with a good husband is likely to benefit her family in various intangible ways. If the Lord

doesn't attend to that, his Steward probably will make discreet arrangements.

Divorce is virtually unknown on Pern. There is no legal way to dissolve a marriage, even if one or the other partner is found to be unfaithful. Among the common holders, a sort of divorce sometimes happens, but it is every bit as disgraceful as having a child out of wedlock. A husband or wife who tried to run away would be quickly recaptured (remember, travel is very slow and expensive) and returned in deep disgrace even if no children were involved. Anyone trying to run out on a child would be even worse off, and would never be trusted by anyone ever again, though they would still not be allowed to leave. Among the higher strata of society, a marriage is likely to have political aspects that make divorce even more unthinkable than for the common people.

Certain herbal forms of birth control do exist, but few holders and crafters know of them, and fewer still approve of them or can easily get hold of them. Having lots of children is a mark of pride for a married man or woman, and except in the case of risk of death in delivery, few women have any desire to limit their childbearing capabilities once they are married.

Holdless traders, however, are another matter. They have a bad reputation, even though it's often undeserved, and so they have entirely their own code of honor. Girls are not raised to protect their chastity like a precious jewel, and the herbal birth control methods are widely known and freely used. These remedies are not, however, 100% foolproof, and the holdless girl who found herself pregnant had better get herself a husband quickly, or she would be almost as shamed as the single mother of holder or crafter breeding. If she got married, though, nobody would mind that the child was born a little too soon. Such attitudes and standards may vary greatly from one caravan to another, depending usually on the opinions of the caravan leader.