

Dragonquest Study Guide

Dragonquest by Anne McCaffrey

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Dragonquest Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	18
Chapter 7.....	20
Chapter 8.....	22
Chapter 9.....	25
Chapter 10.....	27
Chapter 11.....	30
Chapter 12.....	32
Chapter 13.....	35
Chapter 14.....	38
Chapter 15.....	40
Chapter 16.....	43
Characters.....	46
Objects/Places.....	54
Themes.....	58
Style.....	60
Quotes.....	63
Topics for Discussion.....	66



Plot Summary

Dragonquest is the story of how all factions on a tradition-bound planet rally together to find a more permanent solution to a deadly menace than the valiant battle waged by fire breathing dragons and their heroic riders.

The planet Pern is menaced not only by Thread, a dreaded infiltration from space that burns flora and fauna, but also by friction among the ruling Lord Holders and between stodgy Oldtime dragonmen and current progressives led by F'lar of Benden Weyr. F'lar is a moderate reformer. Short-tempered T'bor is his only ally. Dragons transport themselves and their riders across space instantaneously -a bone-chilling experience called "bursting out of between" - and communicate telepathically among themselves and with the riders to whom they are "Impressed." Currently the defense against Threadfall calls for dragons char it mid-air and human ground crews to be sure none has gotten through and burrowed into the soil. F'lar knows there must be more effective ways.

F'lar's half-brother, F'nor, is wounded in an attack by dragonriders and nursed at Southern by the dragonrider Brekke, assistant to the nasty, seductive Weyrwoman Kylara. Brekke is able to talk to dragons besides her Wirenth. F'nor discovers a nest of fire lizard hatchlings, and he, Brekke, and her fosterling Mirrim rescue and Impress a few. The leaders consider whether commoners keeping them as pets might not experience the unique love that dragons give and receive. By accident, they happen upon ancient scientific equipment that gives hope of ending the scourge of Thread. Kylara goes into the dragon business to get revenge on anyone who has ever wronged her.

A number of events converge: a "distance-writer" (telegraph) is invented, providing quick communications across Pern. Off-schedule Threadfall in the Southern Weyr reveals grubs that seem to protect vegetation; this is proven experimentally at Benden Weyr. Showing off her lizard, Kylara sows enmity among the Lord Holders at a gala wedding, where all the various options for fighting Thread come together and compete. Threadfall galvanizes everyone except T'ron, who picks a fight with F'lar, wounds him gravely, but is defeated, leading to the Oldtimers' exile and a chance for the North to embrace F'lar's big picture. Still, it remains a hard sell. Some demand an expedition to the Red Star, but this is impossible without in-depth and interdisciplinary study and cooperation across jurisdictions

Kylara alienates her Prideth, who goes into heat at the same time as Brekke's Wirenth, resulting in the tragic death of two queens. Brekke becomes suicidally depressed and F'nor drops all else to attend to her. The Lord Holders take turns observing the Red Star through an ancient "distance-viewer" (telescope) and hope it can provide the data by brave dragonriders to invade. Queen Ramoth's eggs hatch, and the underaged Lord Jaxom Impresses one, inspiring his fellow nobles argue about what to do. Finally, there are calls for eliminating passé customs. It is discovered that farmers for generations have been exterminating grubs as pests, thus preventing Pern from becoming immune.



To keep his invaluable half-brother from taking the risk, F'nor and Canth go between to the Red Star, where they nearly perish in a broiling maelstrom. In the end, unromantic grubs are recognized as Pern's salvation, but the romantic dragons and their riders are destined to shine on.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Robinton, the Masterharper of Pern, wonders what ballads to compose for a wedding that the notables will attend. How does one portray the common debt to the dragonmen? At Fort Hold, Lord Groghe has every inhabitant planting crops to the detriment of the fire watch. Perhaps in protest against Weyr neglect, he ignores the duty of removing greenery near his habitations, but guards his forest against Thread. At Fort Weyr, T'ron and Mardra are also lax. Using satire on them is pointless, and because the weyrs are autonomous, prodding F'lar of Benden Weyr cannot help. At any rate, he has ceded leadership in the face of Oldtimers' objections. Perhaps it is time just to emphasize the threat that a mere 200 dragons and their riders must withstand. Robinton finds ways to portray the notables in song - Lessa, F'lar, Fandarel, and Lytol - but for the gentle dragons, no theme is grand enough. Dragons are impressed at hatching by humans who will ride, tend, love them, and communicate mind-to-mind. Dragons can transfer themselves mysteriously through time and space. An urgent drum roll announces that Threads are falling prematurely on Tillek Hold. At Fort Hold, the single watchman is oblivious.

F'nor and his big brown dragon Canth are sleepy from searching for a rider candidate for a golden egg now hardening at Benden Weyr. They are on the eastern coast, where cliff sides are dotted with weyrs. Beyond is the barracks where young riders are trained. F'nor knows this promising group will need its lessons far more than he during the 400 turns in which the Red Star has refrained from spewing Thread on Pern. Now it happens every day. Canth has a knack for spotting good candidates for fighting dragons and breeding queens. F'nor recalls the hostility they encounter from small holders and crafters in Southern Boll until he identifies himself as a Benden Weyr dragonrider. Fort Weyr, which protects Southern Boll, is lead by T'ron, a stickler about outside recruitment, but grown lax. F'lar considers the foolishness of inbreeding and knows there are more hatchlings in Benden Weyr than potential riders.

F'nor and Canth smell boiling numbweed, as the women labor hard to produce the remedy for Thread burns. In the huge kitchen, food is available at the entrance, but F'nor must first deal with his birth mother, Manora, Lessa, and Brekke, rider of Wirenth, one of his recruits. Manora shows how a numbweed kettle has cracked and discolored and wants F'nor in F'lar's absence, to take it to for study to Master Fandarel. F'lar and Lessa are "permanently attached" and well matched to lead Benden Weyr. She has one natural child, who according to Pernese tradition, is brought up by a foster mother. Girls from all over want to come to Benden Weyr where they are not expected to wear themselves out bearing children.

F'nor and Canth fly up the valley to a complex of buildings on the left side of the Falls. Smoke shows that the smithies are working at full capacity. Canth greets two dragons, Beth a brilliant green, showing she is fertile, and Seventh, a protective brown. The men



at work in the massive hall are sullen. At the far end, F'nor sees two dragonriders, B'naj and T'reb, menacing Terry, Fandarel's assistant. Twice F'nor prevents violence and is stabbed viciously.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 establishes some major characters, both human and dragon, and suggests the intimate bonds between them. It makes clear that the planet Pern is not only menaced by a dreaded infiltration from space but also by friction among the ruling classes and between Oldtime and current weyrleaders. The society appears medieval and lacking in most technologies. "Weyr" designates where dragons and their riders live and "Holds" where commoners live, governed by "Lord Holders." Each weyr defends a given hold against burning Threadfall from space. The third major pillar of Pernese society, the Craft guilds, are introduced in the next chapter. Weyrs and holds are spread out across the Northern hemisphere of Pern. Characters are categorized as weyr-, hold-, or craftbred, and weyr-, hold-, and craft- are frequently compounded to other nouns. Characters whose names include an honorific apostrophe are dragonriders. The rogue dragonriders resent F'nor's mentioning they should not be out and about with a dragon that is about the "rise." This term for coming into heat is used repeatedly before its aptness is shown dramatically in Chapter 12.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Mnemoth "bursts out of between" at high altitude and calms his rider as they descend, reminding F'lar that he has called this meeting. T'ron has made the meeting as inconvenient as possible for the eastern rulers, G'narish of Igen, R'mart of Telgar, and F'lar worst of all. The real issue is a violation of fundamental rules. Dragons are never to be taken from their weyrs when green (in heat); and dragonriders must avoid situations that could cause dragons to go berserk or kill themselves if their riders is injured or dies. Today's violation is far greater than F'lar's recruiting outside riders when sufficient weyr boys can be found; breeding dragons to produce larger clutches, larger bronzes, and queens. It's even more significant than inviting Holders and Crafters to experience vicariously the "mysterious rite" of Impressions; and replacing drums by messenger dragons in every major Hold and Craft, so messages go coast to coast instantly and ungarbled. Dragonmen must be accessible and friendly, not obsessed with privacy like the Oldtimers. F'lar has noticed that R'mart and G'narish, the youngest Oldtimers, recently seem more receptive. He wishes Lessa could have come, but is glad that touchy, promiscuous Mardra is absent. Fellow Ruathans, their friendship has turned to hatred over Lessa's stepping yielding power to Lord Jaxom. The other prominent are each difficult in her own way, so it is better to let men settle matters.

F'lar enters the Council Room reminding himself to put up with T'ron as Lessa does with Mardra. D'ram and G'narish nod, but T'bor gives a hearty greeting. F'lar apologizes for the emergency meeting, but T'ron assumes control. He remains testy through chitchat and eventually starts with members missing. T'bor is angry from the start, taking F'lar's side. T'ron gets the group to admit that greens can change rapidly and attacks F'lar for siding with a Craftmaster over dragonfolk; the facts of the dispute have no bearing. D'ram demands that they settle the grievance, not complicate it with irrelevancies, but in the end concludes Terry and F'nor are the causes of a "disgraceful public brawl." T'bor is indignant as T'ron adjourns the unfinished meeting, but eventually says T'reb and B'naj will "hear" from him. On the way to their dragons, F'lar calms T'bor, saying one cannot tell someone something he is unwilling to hear, and the important thing is that today's lapse is unlikely to be repeated. T'ron has lost because F'lar refuses to lose control and attack him. They must be grateful for the Oldtimers' wisdom and never forget their purpose and responsibility to Pern. Understanding, Benden and Southern and must bring the Oldtimers around. Short-tempered, stubborn T'bor is a fine dragonrider and successful leader and looks instinctively to F'lar for direction and companionship. F'lar is sure that blonde, sensual Kylara, whom he eased out of Benden Weyr, has made T'bor touchy.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 shows F'lar in the council of weyrleaders, most of whom are stodgy old men, set in their ways. Class prejudice on Pern is great and heavily ingrained in the Oldtimers. F'lar is a moderate reformer who gets on the conservatives' nerves but obtains results. Short-tempered T'bor appears to be his only ally. Dragons not only transport themselves and their riders across space instantaneously -a bone-chilling experience - (called "bursting out of between"), but also communicate telepathically. They are sensitive to their riders' well-being, and the females are sexually unstable when in heat. This affects other species including humans. "Impress" means to link for life with a dragon hatchling; it is a concept so important in Pernese culture that it is always capitalized.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ramoth hears from a green dragon at Lemos Hold that Threads are falling and uses her full-throated brassy bugle call to scramble dragons, riders and pick up Lessa. She joins the others. The Thread is ahead of schedule and misplaced, but F'lar cares only about having enough riders aloft to form a low-altitude wing. Screaming, flaming dragons skim Lord Asgenar's hardwood forest to get their bearings then soar aloft to meet the descending sheet of Thread. A dragon screams and disappears between, where cold shatters and breaks the Threads before they can eat into his flesh. Mnementh watches for signs of Thread burrowing and repeatedly plunges at thick patches, braking at the last moment and belching destructive fire. F'lar feeds him blocks of firestone on the fly. High above, they watch patterns and casualties going between and then returning. As the Thread stops falling, the dragons descend to help ground crews. Casualties are minor, two the result of rider error, which angers F'lar. His biggest concern is why Threads are dropping out of the pattern he has so meticulously researched from ancient records. With no intelligence, Threads are deviating overnight. He will recheck.

F'lar finds Lord Asgenar, a young man recently confirmed in his honors and refreshingly free of the Lords' attitude about gratitude due to dragonmen. Had the unexpected Threads fallen on Lord Sifer of Birta Hold or Lord Raid of Benden Hold, F'lar's explanation would be harder. They land beside Asgenar's green dragon, who sounded the original alarm. Asgenar is personally directing ground crews. He asks about "recent variations," not criticizing, but wondering about rumors about a lack of forewarning. F'lar maintains there is no way to predict such things and some rulers are uncooperative. Vigilance by foresters is the only defense. No pattern in the Thread shifts is evident. Wingriders circle overhead, reporting nine infestations are controlled with minimal damage. A runner approaches, fearful of the dragons, although Pernese know dragons will not hurt humans; he gasps out an all clear in the south and collapses. Asgenar is happy the hardwoods will survive so he can provide free firewood to his people, something many greedy holders will not do, and frustrated that no decision has yet been made on Bendarek's guild. Asgenar intends to speak up at the Lord Holders' Conclave. Another runner comes to report the north is clear and secure. Various wings are reporting all clear. It should be thus for seven days, by which time F'lar expects definite news.

Mnementh flies an elliptical final check of the forests, before going between to head home. The cold aggravates F'lar's facial wounds. As they land, Lessa runs out with a pot of numbweed to treat F'lar. With bouncing plaited hair and "subtle roundness of breast and hip," Lessa is alluring. She talks about other victims and wishes Fandarel's craftsman would complete eyeguards. Talk of abortions in the Hold pains Lessa who cannot get pregnant after giving birth to Felessan, as riding between makes carrying to term impossible. F'lar reports his talks with Asgenar and she wishes she had never gone back in time to fetch the Oldtimers; F'lar could have figured out a way to cope. She



wants to bring them up to date. Fidranth circles and lands, bringing T'ron, who waves an ancient paper in F'lar's face and claims to have proof his timetables are incomplete. F'lar accuses T'kul and R'mart of withholding useful information. Lessa enters, gowned and coifed and determined to charm T'ron, whose eyes wander over her as she asks advice and help. F'lar is amused. T'ron complains about the forests they must care for, but Lessa reminds him of the comfort of wooden chairs. Gazing at T'ron's papers with "unfeigned awe," Lessa eases them from him and suggests there must be missed clues about why a stable pattern should change its rhythm. T'ron is troubled that the records fail them when the need them most.

Mnemoth and Fidranth bugle news that more visitors are arriving: D'ram and G'narish, both agitated. A messenger reports R'mart is badly hurt along with many men and dragons at Telgar Weyr. Lessa declares it is time to lay aside weyr autonomy and race to their aid. As G'narish agrees, F'lar knows he is a step closer to modernity. They talk about T'ron's findings and the steps individual leaders have taken. F'lar calls for planetwide measures, which T'ron takes as another attempt at lodging dragons in Holds and Crafhalls. Holds have enormous manpower that could be tapped, G'narish opines, and much of the old hardware for early alerts against Fax remains in place. Weyrlings can be pressed into service, to get practice and stay out of mischief. F'lar tries to look nonchalant about previous shifts have occurred before. T'ron declares all weyrs must stick together, and G'narish is angry with the Lord Holders. F'lar says Dragonfolk have never explained themselves to others; they are experts to whom cowards turn seven turns ago, and if now they do not want their forests and croplands protected, they can burn their profits. Disgusted at his own hypocrisy, F'lar summarizes that they will mount watches to track the shift. The Oldtimers close ranks, ending the "momentary harmony." Lessa reports that the messenger has overstated matters. G'narish intends to stop at Telgar and verify this. Other heavenly bodies could be causing the change, just as they cause the Red Star for years not to pass close enough to cause problems. They all talk about years when there was no infestation and the Dragonriders suffer lethargy. When it ends, there are too few defenders. They must bring the Oldtimers forward and not get bogged down in small issues. They must reconcile old and new and use the current crisis to their advantage. They cannot go back to a separation of Hold, Craft, and Weyr; all need the convenience of instant transportation. Perhaps Fandarel can come up with something. Lessa tells F'lar that Fandarel and Robinton are due soon and predicts they will drink and talk excessively. Lytol should come too, if he would agree. F'lar wonders how he can be optimistic when Pern's problems are coming to roost on his weyr ledge again.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 picks up the pace, showing dragons and their riders in action fighting the Thread, then settles back for analyses of the battle and the beginnings of discussion of how everyone on Pern can pull together for the common good. Lessa emerges as a fuller character, alluring and tragic in her inability to bear any more children. Note that in the novel, the mysterious state through which dragons and their riders jump time and space — "between" — is always italicized.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Kylara whirls before her mirror, examining a new red gown and practicing scowls. Seeing the hem uneven, she summons Rannelly, her elderly servant, who comes mumbling to herself continually. As Weyrwoman at Southern, rider of the queen, and by blood a Telgar, Kylara demands proper treatment. Rannelly informs her preening mistress that he has been looking for her - and wonders if he has caused the bruises that Kylara tries to hide. Weyrfolk should not mix with Holders, Rannelly declares, but Kylara counters: the point of being Weyrwoman is to do as she pleases. Kylara admires her belly, flat despite bearing "five brats"; now she knows how to go between to avoid that happening again. Kylara's golden dragon Prideth awakens and reminds her that Meron is no dragonrider. While Kylara scratches Prideth with a brush, they talk of mating. Prideth wants Mnemeth, but refuses to contend with Ramoth. Kylara recalls her mother being used sexually and cast aside by Lord Telgar and reflects on being saved from such a fate by a Search and being matched with Prideth. They love one another completely.

T'bor orders weyrlings about in the distance. Kylara finds him ineffectual in comparison with ruthless, ambitious Meron, and rudely ignores his forced-cheerful greeting. T'bor is tall and good-looking, but his nervous darting eyes detract. Prideth likes T'bor and his devotion to Kylara. When he asks how many weyrs are free, Kylara snaps that Brekke knows such facts, and complains about Southern Weyr being everyone's convalescent center. Kylara is certain that bony, boyish Brekke shares T'bor's bed when she is away, while secretly pining for F'nor. Kylara thinks of Lessa, so subservient to F'lar, still aching to be pregnant, and such a fool to have brought the Oldtimers back when she could have ruled the planet. Kylara has no intention of staying trapped here, tending the wounded, and tilling the soil. She may not have been invited to the Telgar wedding, but is related and intends to go.

Brekke is changing F'nor's dressing when T'bor finds her. F'nor finds her far too serious for her years and guesses Kylara has aged her prematurely. He wants to protest Brekke's excessive responsibilities and lack of privileges, but holds back. Her queen, Wirenth, is still young and requires much care; she is fostering Mirrim, and volunteers to treat the most seriously wounded, having a sense for when they need attention. Half come from Fort Weyr and five of the worst wounded fly in Mardra's wing. Rather than make Loranth sterile by feeding her firestone, she uses a flamethrower to fight Threads, which results in crew injuries at the speed dragons fly. F'nor is angered and sounds like an Oldtimer bemoaning loss of order, permissiveness, and chaos. T'bor laughs, recalls the farcical Weyrleaders' meeting, and relates that Kylara intends to cause trouble at the Telgar wedding. When T'bor lets slip the change in Thread patterns, Brekke fills F'nor in on recent events. F'nor is glad the Oldtimers at least have been roused.



Brekke warns F'nor against returning to duty prematurely and suggests he take Canth to the beach. F'nor is amazed to see Brekke speaking with Canth and Canth calling her by name. Without between, the flight is long before they settle at a secluded cover with a bay deep enough for enthusiastic dragon bathing. Afterwards, both sleep. Canth gently awakens F'nor, alerting him to a tiny golden dragon perched on his forearm. They speak to it in a comforting mental whisper. The lizard is surprised to learn it belongs to enormous Canth's blood. F'nor enthuses that this is a fire lizard, a creature of legend, never captured. Dragons have been bred from something that small. F'nor would like to train it to carry messages through between. When the lizard returns, F'nor talks persuasively as it hovers at eye level, just beyond his reach and feeds it, gradually getting to where it will accept a morsel from his fingers. Canth informs F'nor that he has Impressed this hatchling. Seeing a nest of hundreds of squawking hatchlings on the beach, F'nor tells Canth to rouse the weyr through Prideth and Wirenth. Above, wild wherries, carrion eaters, are flocking. F'nor dares not move, lest he break the fragile Impressing. Shrieks of pain erupt, for the hatchlings are cannibals, and the little queen lizard darts up F'nor's sling seeking protection. As the wherries plunge, a riderless green dragon appears, belching fire, and scattering them. Canth reveals he has summoned Brekke, who brings three rescuers, who together save seven, two badly injured. The survivors consume a haunch of buck and grow sleepy enough to be taken to the Infirmary.

At Southern, news spreads rapidly. Mirrim sits stiffly, filled with joy, having two green lizards sleeping on her shoulders and a brown one on her lap. F'nor and Brekke kibitz about Impressing, with its responsibilities and joys. Kylara sweeps in angrily, demanding why she is not told what occurs in her weyr. She menaces Brekke, who is tending to an injured blue, and then Mirrim, whose two greens hiss in her defense. G'sel's bronze gives a piercing cry, and Kylara declares she will have this specimen on her shoulder for effect. G'sel and F'nor warn her off. F'nor enjoys Kylara's frustration, particularly when he reveals the queen he has Impressed. He explains one must be present when the hatch for this to happen. Their ability to go between explains why none has been captured. Kylara demands no shirking of duties as she sweeps out. Mirrim and G'sel make rude comments, but Brekke insists, "Make no judgments where you have no compassion." They discuss the benefits to humankind if commoners were allowed to Impress lizards and get "a small taste of dragon." They might mellow. Brekke is craftbred and G'sel holdbred. Both agree they see dragonriders positively only after Impressing their first dragons.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 focuses on a recuperating F'nor and the dragonrider Brekke who nurses him. Her character is rounded considerably and contrasted with Kylara, whose nastiness has earlier been hinted at but is now seen in action. The mystery of dragon communication is further examined, showing that it is subliminal, emotional, and capable of spanning long distances. Brekke is capable of talking to dragons other than the one she has Impressed, and Canth addresses her by name, a breach of the usual etiquette. The most dramatic element in the chapter is the hatching and rescue of fire lizards and the

suggestion they may become pets of commoners, enabling them to experience the unique love that dragons give and receive.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Jaxom, the 12-year-old Lord of Ruatha, is overwhelmed by all he must know, do, and understand to please Lytol, his Warder. Jaxom often hides just to think. Jaxom has never seen his parents and knows that Lessa is the last of the Ruathan blood. He does not understand these things but knows he must. Jaxom has changed into his finest clothes for a dragon flight to Benden Weyr. He is disappointed they have sent only a green dragon, but delighted that its rider is Jeralte, a former playmate. Jaxom misses the thrill of take-off as he broods over being reminded to use the proper honorific: J'ralt. Soaring over the valley restores Jaxom's spirits, but makes him feel sorry that Lytol has lost the status of dragonrider. Jaxom gasps as they enter between and cannot count to three before they emerge over Benden Weyr. Jaxom spots Lessa, F'lar, and a small figure racing across the Bowl: his friend Felessan. Jaxom stumbles over the traditional words of greeting before running off, being told to stay out of trouble.

Felessan leads Jaxom through the Lower Cavern's communal area where dinner preparations are concluding into a lower room and deeper into the caves. Jaxom feels it is blasphemous to invade the sanctity of a weyr, but follows. At a fork, they follow an ill-lit path, using feeble glows. Child-sized footprints reassure them. They must hurry, Felessan urges, lest Ramoth return from her swim and they lose the chance to look at her eggs. Felessan describes the last Impression. A sliver of light widens and they peer out on mottled eggs lying in the sand. Felessan slides out through a crack, and the larger Jaxom is badly scratched. They admire the "glisteny" queen egg and Felessan is shocked when Jaxom touches an ordinary one, finding it hard as leather and warm. Only "candidates" may touch eggs, Felessan admonishes, but Jaxom feels it is his due as a Lord Holder. A sudden rumble sends them racing to the exit and they keep running deep into the passage. Jaxom needs to rest. Blood is flowing from his chest. As they walk, the last glow flickers and goes out and they see no footprints. Jaxom knows that once Lytol finishes dinner he will send people to search as he does at home. Jaxom wonders about when the weyrs and holds are full, for no one would build such structures for just 420 fighting dragons - or the 200 ten turns ago. Some of the walls are smooth, meaning they are ancient and must lead to dead ends or the main section. The boys cling to the walls and one another as they walk on. Jaxom finds seams in the rock and a square plate, which he pushes. The wall slides back and light shines out - just before inert gas overcomes them. Searchers will at least see the light.

Lessa compliments Lytol on raising Jaxom as they walk in from the landing area to the quarters where Robinton and Fandarel are waiting. Over wine, Fandarel announces news to share, but F'lar talks about the premature Threadfall, which Robinton corrects: "Threadfalls." Drumroll brings Robinton news from Tillek and Crom Holds, and he is sorry protocol prevents his warning Benden Weyr. F'lar says they get to Lemos ahead of the leading Edge only because he always sends riders to areas expecting Threads. Lytol's face drains of color when he hears the old timetables are no longer accurate and



it will take time to correct them or make new ones. The Lord Holders will be shocked. They talk about the tradition of weyr autonomy, the Oldtimers' efforts to exclude all others, and Holders' refusal to come to one another's aid. Homeless families are growing bitter towards the dragonmen and there are stories of girls being abducted against their will, ostensibly during the Search. The Crafts are bitterly disillusioned over stiff additional levies. All respect Benden Weyr's progressive ways and hope it can lead Pern to a more positive way of thinking. The Oldtimers are hopelessly parochial and inflexible and are so alienating Lord Holders and Craftsmen that a new crisis may bring a fearful reaction. Ex-dragonrider Lytol believes the weyrs are "overbearing, wrongheaded and demanding," and unwilling to do their jobs.

F'lar guarantees cooperation, for the Oldtimers have been shaken and watch fires are going back into service. Robinton offers drummer help. Lytol wants weyrleaders to assign riders to the holds as Benden Weyr does, for instant communication brings security. Fandarel believes he has a solution, but the production of instruments and stringing of wire require more time than they have. Perm's good must be put above all else. Robinton suggests that they use the upcoming wedding at Telgar Hold to demonstrate Fandarel's system. Lessa urges F'lar to resume overall command. Fandarel explains briefly how code permits long-distance communications. Men must be trained to understand, send, and receive it. Lytol volunteers to talk to Sangel and Groghe discretely, taking advantage of his varied background and emphasizing that Thread makes no distinction in what it destroys. He and Lytol prepare to leave immediately.

Jaxom is missing, and a search begins. Women remember them pilfering in the kitchen and heading towards some boys who, under questioning, hypothesize they are sneaking a look at eggs. Manora knows about such antics and watches that boys return safely. The adults split up to search, and F'lar and Lytol quickly see the light and find the unconscious boys. Seeing Lytol's response to blood, Lessa believes his heart has unfrozen, which will help him provide the affection that sensitive Jaxom needs. Numbweed is applied and the boys evacuated. Fandarel explores, finding weird ladder-like designs with scribbles, and an amazing countertop extruded in a single sheet. F'lar recognizes the scribble-design from a metal plate that mentions fire lizards, but cannot understand the ancient word, "Eureka." Magnetic cabinet doors delight Fandarel and he is at first baffled by a microscope he finds inside until an old diagram helps him figure out the operation and all delight taking turns studying a magnified hairs. Fandarel believes a similar instrument could make distant objects large enough to study. F'lar declares it best to cut off the Thread at its source: once a dragon has a picture of his destination, he can go anywhere.

Jaxom awakes, relieved to see light, and learns Felessan is eating dinner. Manora tells him they face a stern word or two at most, but ought not to continue "unauthorized expeditions." They have the honor of discovering three remarkable rooms containing odd objects that are being studied. In the Main Cavern, Jaxom realizes people are halting conversations to look at him and walks with dignity befitting his rank. He believes he sees Mnemeth wink at him and hears him speak. Jaxom is not prepared for all the celebrities assembled at the table, but greets them as protocol demands, sits beside his



friend, and eats voraciously. Fandarel has spread out a faded Record skin and is examining it, showing ground-level access to the Bowl, now sealed up by a substance superior to mortar. Jaxom continues to expect adult wrath, particularly Lytol's, but the adults are enthusiastic about the finds. Jaxom is almost sick with relief.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 is pure adventure as two boys furtively spy on a queen's eggs and then get lost in a labyrinth trying to get back. The hierarchical structure of Pernese society is again examined through the boys, and Lessa's still-mysterious relationship to Ruatha is clarified. The adults are coming together on a progressive way of cooperating to face the common threat, realizing the weight of tradition they are struggling against. They then become giddy as schoolchildren exploring the sealed, ancient rooms that the real children discover, and finding additional reasons to hope that they can end the scourge of Threads.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Kylara is exultant when she finally finds a full nest of fire lizard eggs, which she intends to give to Meron of Nabol to see if he can Impress one. If he succeeds, she will likely enjoy his "natural endowment" when the lizards eventually mate. Kylara carefully packs 34 hardened eggs and flies to Nabol Hold; Prideth has tolerated Kylara's preoccupation and basked in the sun while she quarters burning sands looking for nests. Arriving at first light, Kylara is sure Meron has another woman in his bedroom, but begins issuing orders to his staff: fill tubs of warm sand and slaughter animals to provide fresh meat. This is the chance of a lifetime. She explains that fire lizards are the ancestors of dragons and have all their abilities. Kylara explains Impressing: feeding the ravenous hatchlings immediately to prevent their turning cannibal. She sees Meron is as restless as his men and advises that dealing with dragonkind requires patience. She encourages him to picture arriving at the wedding with a lizard on his arm. They will be at his beck and call, giving him not just the advantage of instant communications, but true control. As the eggs begin to rock, Kylara reminds the company that lizards are not captured, but convinced that they can love and trust. She wonders afresh why queens invariably choose women raised outside the weyr (Brekke and Varena) and virtually every weyrbred boy becomes a rider. Commoners can enjoy success (Brekke's "brat" with three successes). There is no accounting for draconian taste.

Meron concentrates on his selected eggs, holding bloody handfuls of meat. Since seeing the fledglings in the Infirmary, Kylara has craved such a dainty creature. She sees being a queen's rider only as a source of power, privilege, and freedom, fails to understand her relationship with Prideth, and looks to dominate these miniatures. Giving lizards to the most despised Holder of all will be payback for real and imagined slights. As her golden egg rocks and splits, and a tiny lizard struggles to free itself, Kylara thinks welcoming, affectionate thoughts and lays a glob of meat in her path. Each successive lure is placed closer, and by the fifth, the tiny queen is in Kylara's hand. She continues popping morsels into its maw as she carries her away from the chaos. The men are ignoring advice and the hatchlings begin devouring one another. Kylara is satisfied that Meron will probably lose all of his. She advises the men to feed the lizards until they are insensible, let them sleep, and begin feeding when they awaken. Bathe and rub their skin with oil, for patchy skin can kill in the between. Dragons cannot be kept; they choose to stay. Kylara grows tired of teaching and goes off to Meron's chambers. Prideth is unhappy at the clutch's fate, but Kylara has what she wants.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 shows, with tongue in cheek, selfish Kylara in the fire dragon business, revenge against anyone who has ever wronged her being her only motive. Still, she describes in detail how Impressing is done and the basics of dragon psychology. In the

end, she does not understand her relationship with Prideth, whom earlier she is shown caring for and loving quite sincerely.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

F'lar receives F'nor's message just before flying to see Fandarel's mechanism. Lessa is already aloft. F'lar is hung over from the night before, when he could not break away from hearing the vital information Robinton has about the various minor Holders. It could help effect a revolution. F'lar tries to retain his respect for the Oldtimers but realizes Benden and Southern have improved on their teachings and ride stronger, more intelligent dragons. It is too late to overlook or rationalize the Oldtimers' shortcomings. Below, the sealed entrance is being removed and above the Red Star cannot be seen from this angle. Responses to his initiatives have not been promising. Through the between they emerge over Telgar's chain of lakes and glide downward and land at Smithcrafthall. Terry comes to greet them as Ramoth and Mnementh go to "swim."

Fandarel has not quite perfected a long-distance glass, though he works on it all night. Wansor feels inadequate. Terry is sorry he is about F'nor's wound, but F'lar insists his actions are justified. In the great Hall, diagrams and numbers cover the black stonewall and a long table is jumbled with Record skins and strange equipment. Fandarel stands by the door, studying a sketch. Wansor awakens from a nap and breakfast is summoned via wallbox. They hasten to demonstrate the prototype distance-writer, which utilizes standard litmus testing to create marks representing the various sounds of drum code on a medium. What Fandarel writes locally is transmitted to an identical unit in Crom or Igen - faster than a dragon can fly. A coil of fine wire runs out the window to stone posts stretching to the mountains. The unit can be set to send to Crom and/or Igen or to receive incoming messages.

Women in the garb of smithcrafters bring in trays of steaming food, clearing spots on the table, depositing them, and leaving. As Fandarel sets to eating with "single-minded intensity," Terry explains they cannot waste the talents of their cook on meals; everyone who can has turned crafter. The workers seem not to notice that the food is disgusting. Lessa promises to send a few of the women to help - provided they are not pressed into craftwork - and goes to brew proper klah. Terry tells how old Records reveal answers to problems they had not known existed but none for ones they face. Skins have disintegrated, their data lost. F'lar suggests getting help transcribing records from Robinton, who overflows with apprentices. F'lar wonders if the Craftmasters ever speak or are subject to "cabalistic, inviolable sanctities." Terry's wants all knowledge to be available to all. Humans once knew so much more, and the tantalizing bits they leave get in the way of "independent development. This impresses F'lar They switch to discussing manpower to string wire to Telgar. F'lar promises dragons for fast transport.

Terry enthuses about such cooperation, so opposite the "hedging and hemming" that they get from others. He has seen riders from every weyr, appreciates all the Oldtimers have done, but declares them "heart-tired, bone-tired," resting on custom, expending minimum energy, and insisting on entitlements. They remember nothing but fighting



Thread, look forward to nothing else, and are out of rhythm with the changes that Hold and Craft have made during the 400 turns of peace - nor do they see the necessity of destroying Thread forever. F'lar admits he has never seen this perspective. Fandarel declares, "Talk makes no miracles"; to destroy Thread, dragons must have coordinates. F'lar reads F'nor's message concerning the Impressing of fire lizards. Fandarel suggests consulting the Masterherder. F'lar wishes he had the plate that mentions lizards; it and much valuable information is likely hidden inside ancient Fort Weyr. Terry speculates about fire lizards being trained to carry messages through the between.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 examines the beginning of hands-on work in uniting the planet against the scourge of Thread. Terry emerges as an eloquent proponent of cooperation and progress, sweeping aside the Oldtimers' interference. The distance-writer, which works as promised, is immediately linked with fire dragons, which could compete as means of quick communication. This will be continued several chapters hence, when both elements are present at the Telgar wedding.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

For a fourth time, Brekke tells old Rannelly she has not seen Kylara, checks on Mirrim's wounded lizard, and warns against overfeeding her fluttering greens. Brekke is sure they will stay, given Mirrim's lavish care, and warns against shirking her chores and criticizing Kylara. F'nor asks about word from F'lar and chuckles at the sudden beach activity. Mention of Prideth makes him worry that Kylara has taken her out close to mating, which reminds Brekke to check on Wirenth. F'nor recalls that Brekke is the same age as Lessa when Mnementh first flies Ramoth - and Wirenth is no hatchling, but ready to rise. F'nor dislikes the idea of some bronze rider at Southern who has been with Kylara going to bed with Brekke when her dragon mates with his. Canth is as big as or bigger than any bronze, but tradition dictates only bronzes fly with queens. Brekke's somnolent queen, the best offspring of Ramoth and Mnementh, has lost all trace of adolescence, and alongside her, Brekke looks more feminine and desirable. F'nor suggests an "open flight," but knows this is stupid. A shudder goes through Brekke's body, and F'nor changes the subject to her lizard's name (Berd). She, however, wants to know why women cannot Impress fighting dragons. She has Mirrim in mind and thinks this not revolutionary, for hatchlings find craft and farm boys are acceptable. F'nor disagrees.

F'nar arrives, edgy and wondering where everyone is. T'bor joins them, and his success at Southern Weyr makes F'nar think that perhaps Brekke's "heretical doctrine" is not so wrong. T'bor has riders watching every inch of coastline for eggs. Thread is falling off schedule and in wrong locales, unchecked, and guards and sweeps are ineffective. The half-brothers move to the Weyrhall, where Mirrim is tending stew. She is wide-eyed and nervous meeting F'lar, who admires her "Canth in miniature," and asks about his recovery. The two greens preen on the mantel, responding to F'lar's soft words. Serving themselves, the half-brothers sit at a distance to discuss anticipated trouble with the "disillusioned and dissatisfied" Lord Holders. F'lar provides a terse summary of what he has seen and learned and of plans to demonstrate distance-writing at the Telgar wedding. He hopes the lizards may bridge the gap between Hold and Weyr. F'nor mentions casually that Brekke would like to see Mirrim Impress a fighting dragon. F'lar imagines T'ron's reaction, before agreeing lizards can be useful for communications, if they are trainable. They seem quite draconic in their habits, the dragons admit the relationship and show no jealousy, and the lizards show signs of emotion and inspiring affection in their handlers. Grall, F'nor's queen, has gone between. F'nor imagines the impact of distributing a clutch of eggs set to hatch with a demonstration of Fandarel's gadget.

Grall sleeps curled in the hollow by Canth's ear. F'lar finds her charming and knows Lessa will want one. He then stops hiding the worry that is gnawing at him, declaring time is "as inflexible as an Oldtimer." Dragons send up brassy screams to announce a Thread attack and Southern Weyr reacts instantly to get dragonmen equipped and into



the air. Kylara is missing. T'bor gets coordinates for the fall, in swampland on the edge of the western desert. Wings go between and emerge to begin flaming patches of Thread in an area ideal for burrowing, feeding, and spreading. F'lar and Mnemeth fly a skim pattern, studying the ground for signs of burrowing. The vegetation shows pin-sized blackened puncture wounds, but the soil seems undisturbed. Something bright moves and vanishes. They land and find rich grub life but no sign of Thread. It is mystifying. Finding drowned Thread in brackish pools, F'lar knows he is at the leading Edge, which, T'bor says, has lasted only two hours. Instinct tells F'lar something is wrong; Thread cannot so drastically change set patterns. T'bor sees drowned Thread and scored foliage all the time, but never gives them any thought because there is no burrowing. T'bor's dragon, Orth, provides better information: there is no infestation and the alarm comes late on this first-ever short Fall. F'nor arrives aback Canth and is amazed at the unusual conditions. T'bor worries that Thread has arrived weeks early and is supposedly mindless - so how can it "choose"? F'lar suggests that if the Red Star deviates, Thread may also. They need to find a predictable pattern in the new shifts. Orth summons every rider to search for clues, but the area is "Threadfree."

F'lar has Mnemeth circle one last time before landing, to let pass the urge to beat Kylara and to give T'bor an opportunity to reprimand her. F'lar regrets having pressured Kylara into becoming a Weyrwoman and saddling T'bor with her. It is unconscionable for a queen to be absent during a Thread attack - even an unscheduled one. Surely, Prideth hears the alarm. F'lar notices that no dragon lands at the Infirmary and cannot believe they have fought Thread without a casualty. Kylara is sullen and defensive, saying she has been Impressing a queen, and objects that Wirenth and Brekke give nonsensical coordinates for a Fall over swampland. Kylara reprimands the men for upsetting Prideth so close to mating. F'lar considers throwing Prideth's mating flight into open competition, but owes T'bor too much to insult him this way. When Kylara makes a show of her golden lizard, the creature sinks razor claws into her arm seeking balance, and vanishes when Kylara shakes her loose. Kylara trades insults with F'lar until Prideth's cries grow piteous. Studying a map, F'lar asks about vast uncharted regions that may have been infected while they concentrate only on the coast. T'bor's mind is elsewhere, but when F'lar suggests an open flight, both T'bor and Orth are adamantly opposed. T'bor reveals that Kylara has found a clutch of eggs and turned them over to a Hold whose name Prideth will not speak. Prideth opposes taking fire lizards away from the weyrs. F'lar sees a dragon displeased with her rider as "most unhealthy."

Asking for reports on anything of interest and eggs if T'bor can get them, F'lar departs, knowing he has not only lost the element of surprise with the Lord Holders, but is likely to face complaints about favoritism because of Kylara's actions. Miniature dragons Impressive by anyone could have had a good psychological effect. As they climb, F'lar thinks about how Igen's sandworms devour Thread and wonders if swamp grubs could do likewise. Returning to the swamp, they find the foliage mending itself. Without complaint, Mnemeth jumps between six hours back in time to the beginning of the Fall. Both find it hard not to fight the ominous grayness that covers the sky and then separates into sheets and patches of silvery Thread. They watch it pierce foliage and hiss as it penetrates mud. F'lar nearly vomits seeing grubs feverishly feeding and then burrowing away from light and air. Leaves smolder. F'lar scoops up a clump of grubs



and secures them in the fingers of a glove. They return through time and space to Keroon, where Masterherdsman Sograny is unhappy to receive visitors. He is in the barn supervising the birth of a new mix of herdbeasts. F'lar explains two recent anomalies, the Impressing of a clutch of fire lizard eggs and the grubs. Sograny's eyes go wide with disbelief at the former, but he denies the possibility that dragons could evolve from lizards, and dismisses lizards that abound in Igen as "useless creatures." Seeing the grubs, Sograny screams with indignation at such filth in his habitation. F'lar says they devour Thread like sandworms, but Sograny insists only flame can do that. F'lar apologizes curtly and ironically and departs.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 concentrates on describing an off-schedule Fall of Thread in the Southern Weyr, where it is always rare. It is seen to be anomalous vis-à-vis northern attacks in numerous ways. F'lar and Mnementh go between to travel back through time, an activity mentioned earlier but never described, to study the Fall rather than fight it, and a supposed scientist then rejects the facts that F'lar presents to him. Others scientists will not be so obtuse when F'lar turns to them. Kylara's machinations promise to stir up trouble, and the mental state of her queen dragon Prideth is first mentioned with concern. It soon proves critical. The considerations involved in dragon mating begin to emerge, but will be made far clearer as Prideth comes into heat. Note the preliminary discussion of women riding fighting dragons. The novel has shown Pernese women very much in a pre-liberation situation, as one might expect in a work published in 1971. It fits in with the burgeoning theme of the conflict between stodgy tradition and contemporary needs. "Sandworms" are mentioned only in passing; they are, of course, central to Frank Herbert's novel *Dune*, published shortly before *Dragonquest*.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

F'nor resists a straight flight to the headland, but Canth refuses to go between with his wound. The rhythm of flight soothes him and how Toric, a grounds crew chief, is determined to Impress a lizard, having been turned down at Fort Weyr for a dragon. F'nor wonders how Holders can claim weyrfolk are aloof, patronizing, condescending, and arrogant while being filled with envy for their dragons, possessions, and women." Dragonriding may require no greater skill than the crafts, but does risk loss of life. Toric - and perhaps everyone else - would lose some bitterness if they Impressed lizards. The Oldtimers would react poorly, but they need to realize they are no longer adolescents. As F'nor grows restless, thinking about Brekke if Orth flies Wirenth, Canth soothes him and, as they land, tells him Brekke wants to see him.

Brekke is feeding Berd when F'nor enters and provides meat for hungry Grall. On the subject of Wirenth's rising, serene, competent Brekke is oddly uncertain when it will occur. She feels disoriented. F'nor suggests an open flight to shut Kylara up, but Brekke claims to be content in her life, but F'nor insists she deserves better. Brekke knows "the entire litany" of her good qualities, which makes F'nor determined to erase her self-deprecation. He takes her in his good arm and kisses her and, surprisingly, she surrenders with a total innocence that makes him realize she is a virgin. He demands to know why she has let men believe otherwise. Brekke declares she has loved F'nor since the day they met and had not known only bronzes fly queens. She weeps as he explains weyrfolk must serve their queen's needs, including mating with the riders of her chosen mates. Brekke insists she cannot put up with such "wantonness"; she is inhibited and fears passing that to her dragon. Brekke fears that if she tries to make love to anyone but F'nor, she will freeze up and lose her beloved Wirenth. F'nor explains that when dragons mate, the riders gets caught up in their emotions and form a single will. F'nor worries about how the men conditioned by Kylara could brutalize this child. F'nor carries Brekke to a secluded area she at first resists his advances but then surrenders with a passion impossible without dragon involvement. Afterwards, F'nor is pleased with himself and marvels at how Brekke is "honest in love," generous, sensual, and yet still wholesome. With a moan, Brekke resumes worrying about Wirenth's rising. As he feels her grow unresponsive, F'nor hates himself for compromising and maybe destroying Brekke while trying to help her. His confused thoughts reach Canth, who declares himself as large as most bronzes and able to outlast them all. F'nor declares there is no reason Canth cannot fly Wirenth. It is time to do away with outmoded traditions. In the past, when browns are smaller, there may have been a reason, but no longer. Canth approves as they again make love, believing that "it can't be wrong to be happy."

Kylara is seething as the men depart and vows they will regret their words. Her arm throbs and she wonders where Brekke is. Everyone seems to be avoiding her. Prideth tells Kylara pointedly that she is hungry, and Kylara observes her color is not good. At the Feeding Ground, Prideth jars Kylara by her landing, making Kylara wonder if her



dragon is also without gratitude or sensitivity. As Prideth savagely consumes three large beasts, Kylara pictures them as T'bor and Lessa, and feels better. Having carefully brushed Prideth's hide and watched her fall into contented sleep, Kylara feels her guilt absolved. Feeling filthy after the grooming, she seeks Rannelly to care for her. Passing Brekke's weyr, Kylara hears her and F'nor together. Jealousy flares, but because Kylara moves on, Canth does not alert his rider.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 examines the tense relationship between dragonriders and the rest of Pernese society and reveals a bit more about what dragon mating entails. Brekke's innocence about the process contributes to the fatal mistakes that are approaching, as does Kylara's selfishness, which is alienating her dragon. First, however, Kylara will sow enmity among the Holders at the wedding.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Robinton admires the fine new clothing that Masterweaver Zurg has sewn for the wedding. T'ron has grudgingly agreed to provide transportation. Three dragons appear - green, blue, and bronze. Accompanying harpers Sebell, Talmor, Brudegan and Tagetarl will join three from Telgar to form a grand group. Robinton worries about which dragon to ride. The blue from Telgar arrives first, the green is from the weyr to which his Craft is bound, but Benden shows honor by sending a bronze. The blue and green riders argue, but the bronze refrains; recognizing N'ton, non-weyrbred, Robinton chooses him. The assistants ride the others. They arrive over Telgar Hold's cliff palisades and see the buildings festooned with pennants and flowers. Guests have been arriving for hours. As Robinton bids farewell to N'ton and thanks him for the smooth ride, he is sure Lioth, the bronze dragon, speaks to him. It's a day of great surprises! Robinton instructs his lads about mingling, listening, playing ditties, utilizing drum messages, and avoiding until after the banquet both girls and wine.

Larad, Lord of Telgar Hold, and the bridegroom, Asgenar, are both resplendent outside the Main Hall. With all the women of Telgar wearing white, the bride, Famira, Larad's half-sister, stands out in traditional graduated red. Robinton scans the crowd, which is grouping by region, craft, and rank. Lords Corman of Keroon, Raid of Benden, and Sifer of Bitra are present, but not Groghe of Fort, Sangel of Boll, Meron of Nabol, or Nessel of Crom. Robinton congratulates Larad, who looks concerned and restless, Asgenar, and Famira. The Conclave of Lord Holders must ratify the marriage since their progeny may Hold Telgar or Lemos. The aristocracy casts its seed widely and arranges useful foster relationships. Robinton moves on through the crowd, taking in every nuance of word and gesture. He realizes he has not seen Fandarel, Terry, or any smithcrafters, and worries if the distance-writer is installed. Laughter seems too strident, as though people are forcing themselves to enjoy the day.

Lytol and Jaxom approach Robinton, looking F'lar or Fandarel. Lytol asks how Robinton thinks the Lords will react to Meron and his fire lizard. Robinton has not heard this news and recalls failing as a youth to capture any. Lytol doubts Meron would bother impressing one unless he finds some good use for it. Lytol is most concerned that Kylara is the source. Miniature dragons are the rage in Nabol Hold and every boy on Pern will soon demand one. Meron may use fire lizards to sow dissension and resentment toward the dragonmen when eggs are too few to go around. Brudegan detaches himself and, pretending to tune his instrument, gives his impressions on the crowd. F'lar and Lessa are popular, and Threadfall strikes a dreadful, dissonant note. Robinton observes D'ram and G'narish talking, ill at ease, and ostracized by other Oldtimers. They are relieved when he approaches. They remark that no one from the west seems present except Lytol. R'mart is out of action, and his Wing-second M'rek has taken command. Telgar is so badly understrengthened that they have considered



sending replacements, as used to be the practice long ago. When Robinton inquires if they have Impressed fire lizards, both are incredulous.

There is no mistaking Ramoth and Mnementh as they glide over and other dragons make room for them. F'lar and Lessa mount the steps to their hosts. Resplendent in red and smiling with malice, Kylara enters on Meron's arm, each carrying a fire lizard. People murmur. Corman stalks over for a look, but the lizards scream and hiss. F'lar's voice rings out, declaring that Meron and Kylara are demonstrating living examples of the gifts they bring - and unwrap a clutch of eggs, which must be kept in heated sand to hatch. Kylara and Meron look ready to kill. When Lessa refers to her "little pet," Kylara blazes that she ate Thread yesterday. The words ricochet through the crowd, but Lord Holders are at that moment summoned to Conclave. Craftmasters gather near the kitchen. F'lar summons Robinton to a watchtower where he can observe. All listen as Kylara explains how Prideth sees Thread sign in the High Reaches Range, flies to T'kul, only to be ignored, and Prideth sounds the alarm rallying the dragons. F'lar congratulates Kylara's actions. Kylara demands swift action against T'kul, but they lack precedent and each weyr is autonomous. Kylara explains how she happens to be at High Reaches and how Thread enrages her lizard that eats it and burrows after it. Seeing how far he can consolidate his position as spokesman, F'lar the five recent, diverse Falls, which show no point on Pern is safe and no weyr can relax its vigil. Kylara again demands action against T'kul and T'ron.

Fandarel announces they are ready. F'lar is reluctant to see the distance-writer, which will now not receive the attention it deserves. The gear is set up in a far corner of the Court. More dragons fly overhead, delivering T'ron and Mardra. Mnementh reports nothing is happening in the Conclave as they await Groghe and Sangel. Fandarel completes the assembly and sends a test message. When it succeeds, he puts the machine on stand-by. The dragons extend their wings, blotting out the sun, and Mnementh warns that the Lords are upset over word that T'ron has found a distance-viewer and seen the Red Star. The doors of the Great Hall swing open, the Lords emerge, and Groghe points at F'lar, ready to hurl an accusation, when Fandarel bellows "Igen Hold reports Thread falling. Transmission broken off midsentence." Groghe insists this is impossible. Dragons bugle from the heights and fill the air with wings. F'lar announces he is going to fight, but G'narish insists Igen is his problem. T'ron plants himself in the way, saying Benden Weyr has no right to interfere. Ramoth screams, other queens answer, and she goes between without Lessa riding.

As bronzes gather to take on riders, T'ron goes to his belt knife and he declares he has had enough of Benden's notions, superiority, altruism, and Weyrleader. T'ron slashes, but F'lar ducks and draws his own untested blade, knowing it may decide the fate of Pern. They circle. T'ron moves with surprising agility, and F'lar lets measure his strategy. The Oldtimer changes hands too rapidly for F'lar to react and nicks his wrist. F'lar wonders how T'ron can be so controlled. Perhaps, he has heard about T'kul and wants to take unchallenged control of the weyrs - and then the Holds and Crafts. F'lar remembers fighting advice from his weyring instructor, but T'ron moves too swiftly. A knife rakes across F'lar's belly. T'ron lunges again, mocks, and closes. With two hands, F'lar stabs at the unprotected neck and drives his knife into T'ron's ribs. He collapses.



Desperate not to do the same, F'lar dons T'ron's oversized tunic and demands who supports Benden. It is widespread. Lessa shreds her dress for bandages, and treats F'lar's wound. Numbweed dulls the pain.

As they lift off, Robinton plays appropriate music and F'lar reflects on how this duel is as inevitable as Lessa's flight backward to fetch the Oldtimers. There is a "subtle symmetry" to things and a balance of good and bad. He hopes T'ron lives but knows it might be easier if he does not. He thinks about Southern grubs eating Thread, T'ron's distance-viewer, and facing Fandarel, whose distance-writers works - relaying a crucial message faster than dragon wings - but whose wires are vulnerable. When they are bidden to return, Lessa waits in the gateway with fresh clothes and bandages. F'lar allows her to bathe him and hears her news: Kylara is back, inseparable from Meron, and declaring herself Fort Weyrwoman; T'ron is at Southern for treatment and Mardra's protest against their exile dies against a united front; T'kul is heading South and it makes sense for T'bor to run High Reaches. P'zar and "N'ton will lead well at Fort. The dragons like F'lar and have been shadowing him. The Oldtimers have mostly come around. Southern, in the hands of the exiles, is no longer a concern. Only two old queens, past their prime, go south. Lessa almost suspects F'lar has been planning this outcome for a long time. The Holders and Crafters are relieved. Pern is ready to follow Benden. "Until my first mistake!" F'lar adds. Fandarel he is planning installations, Wandsor is working on the distance-viewer, but poor Robinton has no reason to play his marvelous ballad and didactic songs. Laughing, they cross the courtyard, knowing there is something to celebrate.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 depicts the famous marriage promised since Chapter 1. Virtually all of the characters are gathered for the event. The various options that are developing for fighting Thread all come together and compete. Threadfall galvanizes all factions, but as they are rallying to fly off, T'ron deliberately picks a fight with F'lar. Note that dueling is a cardinal sin among dragonriders and an Oldtimer again initiates it. Lessa proposes that the final outcome - all the stodgy conservatives exiled to the relatively Thread-free South and everyone up North united behind F'lar - is perhaps too clean not to have been set up.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In the morning, F'nor asks his half-brother "who's where now?" T'bor and Kylara are at High Reaches; T'kul and Merika are at Southern with most people from High Reaches; most Fort Weyr people want to stay, annoying Mardra; P'zar is acting leader until a queen rises in an open flight. N'ton will be a likely candidate as permanent leader. F'nor resents having been yanked out of Southern along with everyone else on an hour's notice, having just discovered a promising clutch of eggs. Lessa says F'lar has been badly knifed and should be in bed. The embroidered tales are keeping the severity under wraps. F'nor volunteers to do his "popping around." T'kul orders everyone out, including the wounded, and confiscates anything they cannot carry. Sweepriders have orders to flame intruders. Brekke checks T'ron before leaving, to make sure he will survive. This is what F'lar has anticipated. He wants F'nor to make a raid, bring back his lizard eggs, and collect grubs from the western swamp. Ramoth's eggs will hatch soon and Pern's notables are invited to the occasion.

As F'nor departs, teasing F'lar, T'bor enters, looking worn and worried about his new territory. It is sad to see people hiding from dragonmen. No watch fires are set but there are plenty signs of burn. He is so badly received by Oterel that he leave dragons as guards and passes out Toric's last six eggs. F'lar is sure every Hold and Craft will have riders this morning. D'ram, G'narish, and M'rek arrive, talking about stories of going to the Red Star, fire lizards, and "talking wires." F'lar confirms talk about an expedition, but declares there are more important matters first. D'ram, the oldest of the remaining Oldtimers and key to success or failure, has no objection to placing riders in Holds and Crafhalls on an interim basis, for times have changed, Pern has grown big, and Oldtimers cannot make it small again. Coming forward 400 turns in four days is too fast; everything seems familiar but is very different. Yesterday's duel is proof things must change. F'lar agrees: Pern is nearly lost when dragonmen loose touch. This can be prevented by open mating flights, by exchanging dragons to strengthen the breed, and by rotating wings. D'ram cautions against excessive innovation.

The Lord Holders and Craftmasters arrive, eager for answers to last night's questions. The next Thread is likely to fall over the western plains of Telgar and Ruatha later today. M'rek says Telgar is ready to fly, and High Reaches and Ista pledge to join them. Asgenar worries about having to burn forests, but F'lar assures him there are enough dragonriders now to protect Pern's forests. Groghe objects loudly that they must stop wasting time and go after Thread at its source: the Red Star. F'lar agrees that if this is the group's will, he will mount a mission tomorrow. This will, however, leave Pern unprotected during the crossing and tip-to-tip sweeps and require they strip the planet's reserve of firestone and flamethrowers. Groghe feels mocked and interrupts, but F'lar is in earnest. Better observation of the Red Star could make a modest exploratory mission feasible and not raise risks to Pern. F'lar has often wondered why no one has gone before - or if they have. If he would share, Groghe's back tunnels could provide useful



ancient records. Seven turns ago, F'lar gathers everyone to face the ancient scourge, and since then, much has deflected them, but they are better equipped now to deal with Thread. Once before old masters recall skills and techniques lost in the written Records, and cooperating across crossing arbitrary lines can develop new skills and techniques. Half the men jump to their feet applauding and F'lar slips out so they can unwind. Running into F'nor, however, he ushers him into the Council Room to lay out his 23 stolen eggs. F'lar feigns ignorance and leaves it to the assembly to apportion them.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 continues examining the fall-out from the Thread scare and duel during the wedding. The recalcitrants have gone south, where they can be safely ignored. Everyone else comes together to talk about cooperation. Clearly, change is still painful for some, and F'lar has a big picture in mind that may be hard to sell. He talks through the logistics of mounting an expedition to the Red Star as Groghe demands, and everyone sees the folly of going off unprepared. More in-depth and interdisciplinary study- and cooperation across jurisdictions are needed, but clearly, the basis for a great synthesis of methods is coming together.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Canth tells F'nor that F'lar is in his quarters and Mnementh is not worried about him. Tiny Grall swoops in and nuzzles his cheek. To avoid being seen, the half-brothers head to the entry to the Hatching Ground. In a large chamber, stone troughs are planted with various floras. F'lar distributes grubs and is satisfied the grubs can prosper under northern conditions. To complete the experiment, F'nor must collect live, viable Thread this afternoon, which, if the grubs consume it, will lead to mass production and distribution, allowing Thread to fall harmlessly. F'lar has been wondering why humans have spread so slowly across Pern. The ancients possess the equipment needed to leave but not dragons big and intelligent enough. The dragonmen's goal has always been to protect the planet but never to eliminate Thread. Everything has now come together for that to happen. When F'nor suggests that clearing the Red Star will make dragonmen obsolete, F'lar is disillusioned. The project is a secret, with only Lessa and Ramoth knowing in on it. F'nor appreciates the audacity but sees pitfalls. He regrets not mentioning his desire to fly his brown with a queen - a less daring proposal, which underscores F'lar's thesis that dragons have grown large enough that there is no harm in opening the field to browns. F'nor knows the Lords and Craftsmen will stop tithes, forcing the dragonmen into other occupations and wonders if F'lar has plans to heal the Southern breach. He worries that, like Grall, Canth senses his disturbing thoughts, but Canth is fast asleep. He wonders how Brekke and Wirenth are faring.

Brekke is not asleep in the early morning hours, but preparing to inventory the pitiful supplies T'kul has left behind. The weyr is in a sad state of disrepair. The lake is deliberately polluted. They must learn to make do. After four hours in the storage section, Brekke is relieved that the situation is not as dire as she has feared. Kylara and Prideth circle and depart, and T'bor leads several wings out on low-altitude sweeps. Brekke, Vanira and Pilgra supervise necessary tasks. Deeply engrossed, Brekke misses Wirenth's first cry, but Pilgra informs her the dragon is ready to rise and asks if she knows what to do. Brekke is dazed. As Wirenth screams, the herdbeasts stampede, and Pilgra warns not to let Brekke gorge, as this will hamper flight. She cannot stay and help, because the other two queens must be flown away. She leaves saying, "Don't be scared. It's wonderful." The bronzes return, urgent to mate. Realizing she must protect Wirenth, Brekke runs to the Feeding Ground as aroused browns, blues, and greens watch. Wirenth's blood lust communicates to Brekke, who resists something so foreign to her background, but bronze riders are infected. Brekke bemoans how wrong and evil this is, for Canth is supposed to fly Wirenth. By the time Wirenth has killed her fourth buck, she glows and the bronzes leap at her.

Brekke feels herself merge with Wirenth and fly contemptuously above the clouds into thin air over the lake. Below, a glowing golden queen appears, an intruder, luring bronzes to her. Screaming and tensed for combat, Wirenth dives, is evaded, and wounded along her flank. She recovers from her fall as Prideth, the rival, entices the



bronzes to mate. Furious and humiliated, Wirenth challenges Prideth, then folds her wings and dives to a fearsome collision. Entangled, they plunge toward the mountains, but Prideth wrenches free, gouges Wirenth's shoulders, and slashes across an eye. Other queens appear and divide up, encircling, protecting their champion. Wirenth wants revenge and darts free. Biting down on Prideth's tail, she yanks her from protective custody, mounts her back, and bites into her unprotected neck. Their deadly plummet end when something seizes Wirenth with a tremendous jerk. She releases Prideth to take on this new menace. It is Canth, come to her rescue. Prideth returns to clamp teeth around Wirenth's neck. In mortal danger, Wirenth goes between, taking Prideth with her.

Tiny, frenzied Berd finds F'nor as he prepares to fight Thread. He cannot understand her, but Canth does: Wirenth has risen. Without thought about their sudden exit, F'nor urges Canth upward, wondering about what awaits them and glad Canth will not engage with dragons too large to handle. The Feeding Ground is bloody and vacant. Leaving F'nor behind, Berd leads Canth to Wirenth, as the dragons simultaneously think, "Prideth also rises!" F'nor calls to Ramoth and curses Kylara for letting Prideth loose. Brekke, surrounded by riders, also vows to kill Kylara before doubling up in agony, holding her sides, protecting her head, covering an eye, writhing, mimicking the aerial combat to which she is "tuned." Suddenly, Brekke turns sultry. The riders are filled with fear and indecision. Brekke is with Wirenth, evading capture and pulling Prideth from among her queens. F'nor keeps anyone from touching Brekke as she flails and a look of "unholy joy" comes over her. Screaming a mortal shriek and grabbing her throat, she stretches, gasps, and whirls. Brekke's soul returns to her body and F'nor catches her as she falls. The stones vibrate with dragon lamentation as F'nor carries Brekke to bed and calls for help. Brekke has a faint pulse. No one knows where Kylara is. Exhausted, grieving, Canth reports going between but failing to find Wirenth. The queens also can do nothing.

Knowing two queens are rising simultaneously, Ramoth goes between to Nabol to stop the mortal combat, and then fetches Lessa and Manora. Manora hurries to Brekke and Lessa tends to the nine bronze riders who are disappointed and stunned at the loss of two queens. Mirrim arrives with a tray too heavy for her bearing spirits. They serve the riders and help them drink. Mirrim is afraid that riders do indeed die when their dragon is killed, but Lessa reassures her. Manora announces Brekke is alive and sleeping. F'lar demands to know where Kylara is. As order is restored, the green rider assigned to Nabol Hold returns Kylara. S'goral reports disgustedly that she arrives talking about a fouled lake and kegs, riding a dragon too golden to be out. When suddenly his green cries out, S'goral knows a mating fight is underway. Prideth attacks Nabol's prized breeding stock. The Lord wishes not to be disturbed, but S'goral does, demanding that Kylara not abuse her dragon this way. S'goral is angry that Brekke has lost her dragon because of Kylara and demands Kylara be punished beyond losing Prideth. D'ram and G'narish know of precedents back in their day. Bronzes are left overnight, for the High Reaches men and dragons are unlikely to be up to fighting Thread tomorrow.



Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 presents the titanic battle between two dragon queens in heat and shows how their riders are emotionally captured and become one with them. Many hints have been given in previous chapters to the drama of a dragon mating, but the reality - even without the mortal combat - far surpasses all anticipation. Before the rising, Brekke is shown as a competent administrator, but the conflict between how she is raised and what is expected of her in this situation leaves her stumbling and inept. Note how she has no choice in the final analysis: her body is taken over by her dragon's agony. Almost lost in the high drama is the ongoing project to test if Thread can be neutralized on Pern and the ramifications of victory on the dragonriders.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The six days since the tragedy are difficult, and Robinton wishes viewing the Red Star could be put off, but pressure for an expedition is high, the novelty helps relieve depression, and doing so demonstrates the dragonmen's sincerity about ridding Pern of Thread. Wansor has set up the distance-viewer on the Star Stones at Fort Weyr, where it is discovered, and which has technical advantages of elevation, angles, and altitude. Fandarel, Wansor, and Lessa arrive are already present. Lessa reports that Brekke is doing as well as can be expected, is never left alone, and is a candidate to Impress one of the Benden hatchlings - over F'nor and Manora's opposition. Brekke is indifferent. She and Lessa are the only humans who can communicate with any dragon, but she is silent, but apparently not "actively suicidal," being craftbred. Lessa wants to slap some sense back into her. F'lar is not recovering well; he is feverish but strong.

Lessa stiffens when Meron arrives. It requires gall to appear in public so soon after playing a part in the deaths of two queens. Meron's fire lizard senses antagonism and. Wansor warns Meron not to touch, as it could destroy hours of work positioning it. Meron is offended that a commoner would talk to him thus. Fandarel steps in and instructs the group how to view and focus. Meron claims first turn and jumps at the sight, terrified. He greedily looks again, until Groghe and Lessa insist his time is up. Robinton wants to rearrange Meron's smug features, but Fandarel intervenes and offers Lessa the eyepiece. The Red Star seems so close. Whitish-pink clouds float over sparkling grayish areas and darker masses. The poles look cloud-free and icy. It resembles Pern, which is unsettling. How could it be cleared of Thread? Lessa retreats to Robinton's side as the Lords take turns. She wishes Meron, who stands apart, would leave. She also wishes the Red Star would look sinister. As they peer into the eyepiece, the Lords wonder out loud whether the gray or darker regions are land. They complain when their time is up and discuss what they think they have seen. Tillek and Nessel jostle over the instrument and throw it out of alignment, and all are impatient as Oterel tries to fix it. Meron strolls forward, his bronze lizard humming happily, to mock the conclusions they are drawing after brief glimpses of the planet. Fandarel and Wansor agree that careful and extensive observation is needed. Robinton has the last turn and declares it safer to "keep this distance between us."

Meron insists that Benden Weyr has no intention of exterminating Thread at its source and says Robinton supports Benden's positions only because he "has a hopeless passion" for Lessa. Lessa realizes this is a plausible, if unfounded, accusation, but Robinton turns it into a joke by citing his well-known love for Benden wines. Furthermore, Robinton is too steeped in Pernese history and lore to want to get any closer to the Red Star. He is certain, however, that those who risk their lives and those of their dragons to fight Thread would be happy to exterminate it and be rid of their obligation to protect the likes of Meron. Can anyone believe that if the jump were easy, dragonriders would not already have made it? Could it be that the seemingly harmless



clouds they have seen are the sloughing off of Thread to plague Pern? Will they find the bones of lost dragons and riders there? Nothing is known, so everything depends on the folly of brave men. Robinton is certain that dragonmen will go to the Red Star. Lessa confirms that this is F'lar's intention. Fandarel and Wansor are making observations and reporting to F'lar so an expedition can be mounted soon. Meron pushes for a definite date, but Wansor insists more observations are essential. Meron concludes this could be a lifelong project. Some Lords come to F'lar's defense, leaving Meron frustrated. He declares dragonriders are obsolete, now that lizards eat Thread. When Lessa suggests ending patrols over Nabol, Meron fills with hatred and his lizard hisses, but Ramoth's deafening warning makes the lizard vanish, and Meron leaves.

Lessa assures Nessel that she is joking about withdrawing patrols; the dragonmen would never leave innocent folk at risk because of irrational behavior. Groghe asks Kylara and is upset to hear no action will be taken; Lessa asks what the Lord Holders are doing about Meron. She suggests they leave the scientists to their observations. Tired and worried about F'lar, Lessa calls for Ramoth. Robinton asks what she really thinks about an expedition, and she wonders if he had been dissembling when talking about wine. She admits it scares her and she believes people must have tried it before. No record exists of anyone jumping further between times than Lessa. They cannot be sure without taking the chance. Robinton's eyes are kind and worried. He gently holds her hand as he says she has to answer another Question Song, like the one that led to her flight. At home, she finds F'lar feverish and restless and sleeps in the cradle of Ramoth's front legs.

F'lar is no better by morning but anxious to hear about the viewing. He hopes to learn something to which the dragons could fly between. They must keep their promise to the Lord Holders. Lessa is sure someone has tried this before, but still Thread endures. A coughing fit cuts F'lar short. Recovering, he petulantly demands F'nor. Lessa doubts she can pry him away from Brekke. N'ton has obtained Thread for the experiment and the grubs instantly attack it. F'lar is triumphant. N'ton is wise and loyal, a good choice for leadership at Fort Weyr. Yet, F'lar needs him at Benden, to explain the full plan to him in the event anything happens to him. F'nor too must know. The death of a leader is how things have failed in the past. Mnementh alerts them that Lioth and a green from Telgar are approaching. The man riding the green is very excited. Wansor accompanies N'ton, carrying a map of the solar system based on his night observations. He points out three newly discovered neighbors orbiting the sun. Thread might not come from the Red Star. Lessa is sure the ancients would not have stipulated the Red Star if it were otherwise. N'ton recalls an ancient drawing at Fort Weyr showing six circles, one with a cluster of smaller satellites as on Wansor's sketch. N'ton reports an odd protuberance on the Red Star reminding him of the tip of Nerat but facing the other direction. Wansor offers to set up a device at Benden, but the angles are wrong after the winter solstice.

F'lar finds N'ton "unobtrusive" as he speaks confidently of the ultimate success of the mission. N'ton confirms the results of the grub tests. F'lar wishes they had not ceded the South to the dissidents, making exploration impossible. Over seven turns of Threadfall, something has protected the South. Only when it starts falling out of phase do the data become clear. N'ton talks of his faith in the order of the universe and believes there are



gaps in the knowledge handed down, but it appears the South has been purposefully abandoned to let grubs take over. With them protecting the growing fields as "ground crews," there is no need to go to the Red Star. Lessa is sure that something breaks down preventing the similar treatment of the North. Nevertheless, even if only to reassure the Lord Holders, F'lar is determined to go. N'ton declares he knows the South well and volunteers to collect grubs widely. F'lar accepts. He feels sorry for Brekke and cannot deprive her of F'nor's comfort. N'ton knows that species differ according to where they live. As he departs, F'lar wills himself to get better.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 shows the Lord Holders taking turns observing the Red Star and forming hypotheses based on conjecture. The true scientists want to work systematically before providing data that brave dragonriders might use to invade. N'ton emerges as such a science-minded youth as he steps in to substitute for F'nor. Observation is confirming rediscovered ancient records, but emotionalism still seems to reign on Pern.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The death of the two queens continues to put a gloom over Pern. Jaxom is not sure if he wants to go to the Hatching and Lytol has been oppressively gloomy. Jaxom is scared that something worse might be coming and dreads even seeing Felessan. Their blasphemy could be behind the bizarre deaths. He wonders why everyone is sorry for Brekke but ignores Kylara. Jaxom knows better than to ask questions. Ruatha has a candidate for the queen egg— Talina. So, he hopes they will attend. Jaxom shivers remembering the wedding day with the duel and Thread falling without rhyme or reason. Routine is dissolving and Perm is on a slide somewhere. Lytol's hard work at Ruatha will be undone. Nothing is fair. A servant informs him he is to dress for the flight to the Hatching and he slips quickly into his wedding clothes. A blue dragon approaches, reminding Jaxom of the fire lizard eggs to which Ruatha is entitled but Lytol declines. D'wer, the blue rider, talks about Talina's chances, but Jaxom is in a funk. Lytol emerges, giving orders to the stewards, and they are off into the between and down at Benden. There are so many dragons that Jaxom fears a collision, but D'wer assures him dragons know and this never happens. Jaxom has a premonition that something must go wrong today.

People and dragons fill the tiered amphitheater surrounding the steaming, immense Hatching Ground. Jaxom joins Felessan, and they find seats a bit removed from Lytol. The dragons begin to hum as the eggs begin to rock, all except a small one that lies by the wall, alone. Jaxom asks about it and maintains he has not harmed it, even if he has touched it. Felessan confirms that candidates have been touching others for weeks and quotes "them" as saying it might not hatch - perhaps should not hatch if the embryo is defective. When the white-clad candidates emerge, Felessan is happy to change the subject and point them out. They are re-impressing Brekke, which makes Jaxom think of Lytol astride a dragon of his own and Talina left out and weeping. People say Brekke is far to o good a weyrwoman to be lost - far better than Kylara. Felessan says there are rumors Canth had been going to fly her queen - or at least F'nor had wanted to try. Felessan knows through Lessa, his mother, about the battle over re-Impressing Brekke.

A great flight of bronze dragons emerges preceding Talina and Brekke, who join five other girls attending the golden egg. The humming stops and shells begin to crack and shatter. Ugly, awkward dragonets flop and squawk as tense candidates try mentally to attract them. The first one free staggers past the nearest boy and bonds with another at whose feet it falls and who helps it up. Lytol's face shows he still feels the pain of the day his dragon Larth dies of phosphine burns. He closes his eyes. The golden egg cracks suddenly and the inmate falls into the sand on her back. Girls help her to her feet but fall back, giving Brekke first opportunity to Impress. The queen steps towards Brekke, but defiant Berd swoops in to drive the dragon back. Brekke protests and captures her little bronze, as the queen buries her head in Talina's skirts. Brekke is



relieved and leaves the grounds. Lytol with a dead voice says it would be terribly wrong had Brekke succeeded.

Newly Impressed dragonets and riders depart together, but Jaxom is too excited not to stay. He observes to Felessan that the smallest egg has not yet cracked. Lytol frowns at the anxiety in Jaxom's voice. Distracted, Felessan observes it probably will not hatch. Jaxom insists someone should help it, as someone helped his mother deliver him. Lytol is indignant and says malformed embryos are best dead. Living crippled is worse. Jaxom sees it begin to rock. With everyone leaving, Jaxom vaults down into the sand, declaring it unfair, and pounding on the hard shell with both fists. The crack widens and a piteous cry emerges. Jaxom helps tear apart the thick slippery sac that imprisons a tiny white body. Jaxom, Lord of Ruatha Hold has made an Impression, oblivious to the ramifications. He names his dragonet Ruth.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter 14 portrays the long-awaited hatching of Queen Ramoth's eggs. The question of whether Brekke should re-Impress after losing Wirenth is settled when determined little Bern intervenes. The death of the queens seems to have destroyed Lytol. Throughout the chapter, Jaxom talks about fairness and believes some terrible event must still lie ahead, in the train of the other disasters. Instead, he Impresses a tiny white dragon, "oblivious to the dilemma he had just originated." The nature of the dilemma - and whether it is the anticipated unfair disaster - is told in the final pages of Dragonquest.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Brekke shudders, remembering the "bowels of the deepest hold." F'nor touches her, Canth reassures her, and the lizards chitter near her. Smiling, she touches her smudged, disheveled lover. He embraces her with a sob and kisses her with relief. She burrows closer, knowing she had been trapped in her mind, hating everyone. Manora advises that Brekke needs to cry, but when she cannot stop, slaps her and has F'nor put her in warm water to relax her muscles and then tuck her into bed. Brekke has felt F'nor and Canth beside her while she most wants to die, and demands why they would force her to the Hatching Ground. F'nor blames F'lar and Lessa, who think it might prevent losing her. An empty ache threatens to pull Brekke back, but Canth forbids it, the lizards press her with affection and concern, and F'nor cries in terror and yearning. Brekke begs never to be left alone, and Canth declares, "I am here," as F'nor wraps her in his arms. Brekke hears the lizards say they care. They cannot contemplate what might have been had Brekke not Impressed Grall. Mirrim, with her own lizards flying happy circles, comes with broth and a sleeping potion. Before falling into a deep sleep, Brekke orders him to feed maltreated Canth. As he heads to the Feeding Ground, Canth reassures Brekke, "I am with you." Ramoth, Mnementh, and countless dragon voices concur.

Lessa wishes that she could be as uninhibited as the banquet guests. She feels a lingering sadness that she cannot understand or shake. Brekke, F'nor, and F'lar are improving. Lytol is drunk, thanks to Robinton. She figures that N'ton and F'lar are cleaning grubs' orifices as usual but cannot check, because it would be rude for both weyrleaders to be absent. She worries about Jaxom and the admittedly charming Ruth, and is glad his ex-dragonrider Warder knows what to do. The question is where they should live until Ruth dies, as is universally expected. Larad, Sifer, Raid, and Asgenar with Famira are talking about lizards. The Lemos have theirs' with them while the others have eggs hardening. Lessa hopes this interest in lizards will soften the Lords towards Jaxom and Ruth. She wonders how one forms an honorific from "Jaxom." She is adamant that Gemma's son, with his minute quantity of Ruathan blood, must remain at and rule Ruatha Hold; she will not abide seeing the position that she relinquished fall to another bloodline. She regrets that Lytol has no sons. The beast surely cannot survive. Ramoth and Mnementh inform her that Ruth will prosper, and Lessa wonders how much dragons, who live in the eternal present, know and keep concealed from humans.

Lytol drunkenly insists he loves "the boy" and has undone all his father's harm to make Ruatha rich. Having been a dragonrider and a weaver, knowing the holds and everyone of importance, surely he can care for a "white runt," not in Benden Weyr as Raid insists, but at Ruatha, where Jaxom will take up his proper responsibilities once Ruth dies. Having lost a dragon, Lytol can help. The two drunks pass out and Raid, disgusted, walks away. Lessa listens to the others, trying to decide how she "leans." Sifer feels that lizards, plentiful now, are "dragons of a sort," looks forward to his hatching, and believes



Jaxom should stay with his dragon. Larad reminds them that "the boy" is a Lord Holder and that a contested Hold causes problems. Raid insists this goes against all custom, to which Larad replies some customs need changing. Asgenar insists that Jaxom's preference be determined. Wisely, Jaxom respects dragon dignity by not carrying Ruth when summoned. Raid assails Jaxom over the trouble he is causing, but Jaxom stands tall, declares he knows the consequences of his actions, refuses to apologize, and says he will be happy to plead his case before a legally constituted Conclave - not this group. Ruth is less a proper dragon than an overgrown lizard. His first obligation is to blood and hold. As they will be an embarrassment at the weyr, they will go home. Thanks to Lytol's teachings, Jaxom particularly to honors dragonkind, and his rescue of Ruth flows from that. Lytol awakens suddenly and declares that he, not his ward, is responsible and approves of saving the dragon's life and their living at Ruatha. Raid mutters on, but the question is resolved.

F'nor appears, whispering Lessa's axiom: "A weyr is where a dragon is." She fills F'nor in on how N'ton has substituted for him, without making him any less irreplaceable. Panicking over his own mortality, F'lar has brought N'ton into the inner circle. Suddenly sober, Robinton accompanies them to the Rooms to hear what Masterfarmer Andemon has to say. They find him examining the largest tub as F'lar reports the experiment a success as grubs devour every filament of Thread and charred leaves heal. They are hoping Andemon can tell them how or why. He frowns, blinks, twitches, pulls out a clump of soil, and throws on the ground, declaring that they have spent centuries exterminating these pernicious parasites, which cause plant life to droop and die. F'lar protests that his plantings are healthy and the worst looking specimen is the untreated control. If farmers have been ridding their fields of them, they have been "working against Pern's best interests." Robinton says that Records show a recurring belief that Thread will one day cease to be a menace, making it reasonable to assume grubs are the means. N'ton has been jumping between time back seven turns to check Threadfalls in the South and has consistently found grubs and no burrows. Andemon counters that Farmercraft Hall Records warn to "watch for those grubs," and they obeyed by flaming larval sacks. Lessa points out the ironic misinterpretation. Robinton is determined that the premature death of key personnel before they can pass on their knowledge will never again happen. He wants Hold, Craft, and Weyr to have free access to every document. Bendarek has developed a more durable and convenient medium for storing and disseminating data.

When Andemon cautions that some matters must be kept secret, Robinton reminds him that hundreds of turns have thus been lost to Thread. When Andemon questions the future of dragonmen, F'lar admits they will become unnecessary, but only when the whole planet is seeded. Andemon is shocked, thinking about changing farmers' set ways and prejudices. After questioning everyone, examining the tubs, conquering his revulsion, and examining a large grub, he still declares he would rather be beholden to noble dragons than to these creatures. He insists on running independent experiments, and F'lar promises complete cooperation. F'lar realizes the difficulty of selling this solution to the average person - or even the average dragonrider. Andemon cannot estimate how long it takes grubs to invest a field, because farmers have always preempted them. F'lar proposes importing grubs from the South and putting them in



Lemos field, where Asgenar and Bendarek are flexible and have the most to protect. Surely, the luxuriance of Southern vegetation owes more to grub stimulation than temperate weather. With Robinton's help, Andemon can make disciples- although farmers may also need Oldtimers to die off. Andemon understands the magnitude of the undertaking and is committed.

Andemon worries about Brekke, who is originally from his Craffhall. They assure him she is adjusting to the shock, no longer suicidal, loved and respected throughout the weyrs, and, with her talent for hearing any dragon, will always have a place among them. Andemon feels the simple life would be hard on her. He next asks coldly about the "adulterous transgressor" and is hardly satisfied by the fact she is living in a prison of guilt and dragonfolk do not take lives. Exhausted, F'nor foregoes accompanying Lessa and Andemon back to the banquet. Jaxom and Ruth are nowhere to be seen, which hopefully means they have gone to Ruatha. In the weyr with Canth, F'nor reviews the eventful afternoon and considers what remains to be done. F'nor is certain that F'lar has some alternative to the dragonmen's extinction in mind. Grubs may be efficient fighting Thread, but they are repulsive, and people will always want to see dragons in mid-air. Grubs may be the ultimate answer, but not an acceptable one to anyone.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 is set at the banquet celebrating the Hatching. Long passages recall the harrowing fight to save Brekke and make clear the wrenching pain of losing a dragon. This is effectively counterpoised to a drunken Lytol, who still mourns his dragon but is determined to help his ward raise his sickly dragon. The nobles, who have already been shown to be a simpering lot, argue about where the "boy" Lord should live. Finally, there are calls for eliminating obsolete customs. A large part of the chapter takes the major characters away from the banquet hall to meet with Masterfarmer Andemon in an effort to win him over to the grub strategy. Robinton again plays an interesting role as mediator and cheerleader. F'nor's musings about what F'lar might have in mind set up an air of mystery as the final chapter opens.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

At Brekke's insistence, F'nor returns to his duties and she settles into work in the Lower Caverns. Asgenar and Bendarek are won over and open Lemos' precious softwoods to a trial. Riders jump between times to collect the needed larval sacks. Fandarel and Terry improve on the Thread collection device, but have difficulty insulating wire. Denied distance-writing devices, the Lords press for other action. Larad proves more conservative than hoped. Observation and sketching of the Red Star are done nightly, but features remain too indistinct to guide a dragon there. It appears that falls may taper off once the rare conjunction of planets ends. Meron is monopolizing the distance-viewer, seeking coordinates, without saying why. The Red Star's features are unchanging. If, as it appears, no earlier expeditions have been made, there must be good reason, and volunteers will not be sent on a hopeless mission. Pern must rely on the effective protection that the ancients leave: dragons and grubs. Asgenar understands the trouble of visiting the Red Star from watching his lizard grow frantic when unable to visualize a destination. Robinton observes that people expect another miracle from F'lar, to match the three-day salvation he brings during the last crisis; now. Time is the one thing they need but do not have. Brekke takes over caring for the plants, sure grubs are the right solution. She believes Meron has a "warped mind," which could be used to train his lizard to go between to the Red Star - if he has the patience to train it. N'ton has seen Meron's lizard screaming as the master curses dragonkind. N'ton also recalls fascinating cloud drifts that resemble a girl braiding her hair. F'nor too has seen such patterns. Lizards appear less dependent than dragons and apt to disappear between when bored or frustrated.

Canth informs F'nor that Lessa is worried that F'lar will go to the Red Star himself. F'nor insists he is too smart for that and that Mnementh would not allow it. Lessa insists that F'lar alone holds Pern together, so he cannot be risked. Robinton's talk about miraculous three-day salvation will appeal to the Lords until someone proves that conditions on the Red Star preclude it. Raid and Sifer believe that Meron has established coordinates and is maliciously withholding them. When F'nor relates Brekke's theory, Lessa realizes that Meron would sacrifice his lizard, grows angry at Robinton for planting the three-day idea, and insists F'lar is not the one to go. She breaks off and looks at Brekke, who understands. Lessa retires, scared that F'lar is taking precautions to let everyone know everything just in case. F'nor too is disturbed by this interpretation. Brekke seduces F'nor into making love.

F'nor and Grall are loath to leave Brekke and Berd, but F'nor must check on Meron and then determine if the little queen will accept her mission. Canth is in good humor as they jump between to Fort Weyr. Meron's lizard's screech of distress troubles Grall. Meron tells F'nor he has no business at Fort Weyr and turns back to the eyepiece, declaring he will use it as long as he pleases. When his lizard shrieks again, Canth interprets that the little one is terrified of this cruel man - an unheard of condemnation coming from this



dragon. Canth bellows, putting Grall to flight and allowing Meron's lizard to escape in between. Enraged, Meron attacks but Canth blocks his path, and he is escorted to Nabol with strict orders never to return. Threatening a Conclave and calling dragonriders cowards and "neutered perverts," Meron is whisked away.

F'nor is eager to see what Meron has been looking at but struck with fear at the sight of swirling clouds forming first a massive fist at the tip of the gray mass and then a dragon's eye. Gently, F'nor projects to Grall a vision of burning, violent wind that fills him with terror, as Grall launches herself between with a terrible shriek. Canth confirms that F'nor's coordinates are vivid enough to lead him to the fist. Instantly, F'nor prepares for flight, lashing himself to Canth so tightly that he cannot possibly fall off. F'nor considers situations on Pern when clouds are not made of water vapor and can be hazardous or lethal, but is sure Canth is so swift that a few seconds' exposure cannot harm them. They need only get close enough to the surface for Canth's "long eyes" to settle the question. F'nor reconstructs the fist in his mind for Canth to broadcast via Ramoth to every dragon, rider, and fire lizard. F'nor realizes that Brekke's unexpected act of seduction means she already knows and that Lessa has set him up, but he is not angry. Once Lessa has the courage to do as he is. Canth cautions F'nor to fill his lungs and envelops them in the bitter cold of an endless black between.

They burst out into screaming agony, as burning tornadic winds wrench, slam, and tumble them, paralyzing their minds. The surface writhes, bubbles, and oozes. Cyclonic sounds batter their minds unconscious, and they fall, "crippled and impotent." Through his pain, F'nor realizes the "Weyr must be warned!" Grall returns to Brekke, crying, burrowing, trembling, and incoherent. Berd catches the anxiety, as do Mirrim's greens. The five lizards begin keening and diving away from unseen dangers. Brekke works at convincing herself that the biggest, fastest, strongest brown on Pern would not endanger F'nor. Ramoth sounds a brassy alarm, relaying Canth's incredible message from the Red Star. Brekke staggers as other dragons bellow worry. Fire lizards are in pure terror, dragons throughout the Bowl fan their wings in agitation; Ramoth and Mnementh's eyes burn an angry orange; people run around, yelling and questioning. Lessa and F'lar, but she hangs back guiltily. Brekke tells F'lar about the expedition. Suddenly, the Weyr goes silent, as the horrors F'nor and Canth are experiencing sink in. To Canth's plea not to be left alone, every dragon and lizard springs aloft in a great vertical migration. Brekke see a speck tumbling downward. More dragons gather to intercept the speck and deliver the bloody ball gently to the ground. Brekke finds F'nor's pulse and administers mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Canth's pain-soaked tone assures Brekke he is alive and she is not alone and she faints.

Thread, it appears, is spores spun out by planetary turbulence that gravitational forces direct towards Perm, where atmospheric friction turns them into hot filaments. For a fourth time without intervention, observers watch this process occur on the eastern slope of the northern mountains, to a plantation of hardwood trees. Again, there is no burrowing. Groghe wants not to believe his eyes, hating the idea of being grateful to grubs, but the crooning lizard on his shoulder seems to soften him. He claims to have always trusted dragonkind, admits F'lar runs the planet, and stalks away. Corman believes is common sense to protect the ground like their ancestors. F'lar reports that



F'nor is permanently scared but back on his feet. Canth's wings are healing slowly and he no longer looks like "raw meat." The whole Weyr is keeping him well oiled, and he is expected to fly again and fight Thread with greater motivation. Corman realizes it will take a long time to grub the continent, and wonders what future generations of dragonmen will do. F'lar declares this is a "craft secret" and adds the Lords should cheer up: dragons will always do what they do best. There is a Southern continent and hospitable planets to explore. Dragons belong on Pern. It is their home. Mnementh lifts F'lar skyward.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Chapter 16 contains the novel's climax - F'nor and Canth's unexpected and dramatic visit to the inhospitable Red Star. It is preceded and followed by rational attempts to convince the powers-that-be on Pern that grubs are the correct solution to Thread attack. They are effective but not glamorous, which is precisely what everyone wants. F'lar is determined to sacrifice himself to satisfy the Lords, while eternally hostile Meron is willing to sacrifice his fire lizard. Having cloud formations suddenly provide sufficient coordinates for a jump might seem too convenient, but McCaffrey has established that several observers have been imagining discrete objects in what they see. F'nor and Canth's terrible plunge parallels Wirenth and Prideth's, but the massed dragons have time to form a safety net beneath them. In the end, unromantic grubs are Pern's salvation, but the romantic dragons and their riders are destined to shine on.



Characters

F'lar

The Weyrleader Benden Weyr, F'lar is the protagonist of Dragonquest. He rides the mighty bronze dragon, Mnementh, and is permanently attached to - and well matched with - Lessa, the Dragonwoman of Benden Weyr. In the seven turns preceding the novel's opening, F'lar has relinquished the singular authority he exerts when Benden Weyr is the planet Pern's sole surviving weyr. He earlier achieves that authority when after some 400 turns (years) destructive Thread and the undermanned dragonriders fill out their ranks with "Oldtimers" brought forward in time through the between. F'lar's "three-day miracle" becomes legendary, but the Oldtimers want to stay to themselves and observe the old ways. They resent F'lar's progressive attitudes and policies.

When the predictable pattern of Threadfall inexplicably alters, F'lar looks for explanations, and accepts an obvious but non-heroic one: grubs appear to have inoculated the Southern Weyr against Thread. Scientific experiments confirm it. F'lar works to convince the powers-that-be on Pern to accept this reality and work to grub the entire planet. Others demand action that is more dramatic: an expedition to the Red Star to wipe out Thread at its source. At a wedding, F'lar is called out by T'ron, the Oldtimer Weyrleader at Fort Weyr. He is badly wounded in the abdomen by a knife slash before subduing his opponent. F'lar's recovery is slow and he suffers continuing weakness, both of which convince him to delegate authority and let others in on his plans. Lessa takes this as premonitions of death. To stifle dissent among the Lord Holders, F'lar does plan on a personal trip to reconnoiter the Red Star, being unwilling to put the planet and the dragonriders at risk with an invasion. Lessa and Brekke covertly convince F'lar's half-brother F'nor to undertake the mission instead, for no one but F'lar can unite all the factions of Pern.

Brekke

Raised in an agricultural community, Brekke is recruited by F'nor Wing-second of Benden Weyr, and Impresses a golden queen dragonet, Wirenth. Brekke serves as the assistant to Kylara, the preening, ambitious, selfish Weyrwoman at Southern Weyr who has no interest in administrative minutiae. Brekke is a solemn, modest, small-stature girl. She allows rumors that she sleeps with T'bor, Weyrman of Southern Weyr, and other men as a means of preserving herself for F'nor, whom she loves from the first time she sees him. After suffering a knife attack, F'nor becomes a patient in Brekke's Infirmary. In addition to her other duties, she treats the most seriously wounded dragonriders, to whose needs she is particularly sensitive. This is probably related to her truly rare ability to communicate with dragons besides the one she has Impressed.

Brekke also cares for a foster daughter, Mirrim, and Impresses the first of the fire dragons that F'nor discovers hatching. Brekke names this little bronze, Berd. As Wirenth



nears sexual maturity, Brekke is torn between the moralities of craft and weyr. She has heard how riders are drawn into participating in the frenzy that accompanies dragon mating. She and F'nor make love before this crisis comes, and he considers getting the rules relaxed so his brown dragon Canth can "fly" with Wirenth. Tragically, when Wirenth "rises," Brekke has no idea what to do to control her. She loses Wirenth when Kylara's queen goes into heat uncontrolled and attacks her. Both perish. The trauma of losing her beloved dragon throws Brekke into nearly suicidal depression. Hoping to restore Brekke, F'lar and Lessa try to re-Impress her on a new queen, but she refuses. Brekke recovers thanks to everyone around her and takes up non-riding duties. When Lessa is determined to keep F'lar from going to the Red Star, Brekke seduces F'nor and helps convince him subliminally that he should go instead. When he does and is horribly wounded along with Canth, Brekke administers mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on F'nor and talks Canth back to life. Brekke's motto is, "Make no judgments where you have no compassion."

F'nor

The Wing-second of Benden Weyr, F'nor is the half-brother of the Weyrleader F'lar, and his right hand man. F'nor rides the largest and most powerful of the brown dragon on Pern, Canth. F'nor is the biological son of a difficult woman, Manora, but according to Pernese custom, is raised by an unnamed foster mother. F'nor is less introspective and easier going than F'lar. He approves of his brother's "permanent attachment" to Lessa. F'nor takes the forefront in the novel when he is stabbed in the shoulder while on an errand for Manora. His taking the side of a craftsman over fellow dragonmen becomes the stuff of legend on Pern. It annoys F'nor but proves useful in raising the generally bad impression people hold of dragonfolk.

F'nor is fortunate to recover in a Southern Weyr Infirmary, where he enjoys special care from Weyrwoman Brekke, whom he grows to like and admire. She has secretly loved him since they first meet, when he recruits her for the Weyr. During a major, unexpected attack of Threads, F'nor begins piecing together an explanation for why the South suffers fewer attacks than the North. When he has recovered, he takes his hypothesis - and a handful of grubs - back to Benden for testing. F'nor falls in love with Brekke and, to spare her having to mate with the rider of whichever bronze dragon mates with her Wirenth, he considers getting dispensation from tradition to allow Canth to fly her. The chance never comes because, when Wirenth goes into heat, another queen is recklessly left unattended, attacks her, and both queens die. F'nor abandons everything to bring his beloved Brekke back from the depths of depression that befall her. At the novel's climax, F'nor substitutes for his half-brother in making an exploratory visit to the Red Star. He and Canth are caught in a terrible fiery maelstrom that critically injures both and nearly kills them. He recovers but his face is permanently scarred.



Kylara

The preening, ambitious, selfish Weyrwoman at Southern Weyr, Kylara is a Telgar by blood, the full sister of Lord Holder Larad. She is rescued from a life of constant childbearing by being selected to ride the golden queen dragon Prideth. F'lar, in fact, eases her out of Benden Weyr, in a move that proves very popular. Kylara demands proper treatment and, with no interest in administrative minutiae, dumps all responsibility - and plenty of abuse - on her able assistant, Brekke, whom she wrongly assumes is sleeping with Weyrleader T'bor, rider of Orth, Prideth's latest mate. Kylara considers ineffectual, but lusts for ruthless, ambitious Lord Holder Meron of Nabol Hold, even though he is not a dragonrider. Kylara is beautiful and promiscuous, and when necessary goes between to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Five children are enough and she intends to keep her figure. Although she is completely selfish, Kylara loves Prideth completely and generally takes good care of her. Those who fear Kylara count on this bond to hold her in control. Her relationship with Meron, whom Prideth detests, and the way they treat the tiny fire dragons that they Impress - like trophies to be shown off - sours Prideth towards her rider. This is a most dangerous situation. Despite warnings that Prideth is coming into heat, Kylara flies her to a tryst with Meron and leaves her unattended. Prideth "rises," slaughtering prize livestock and then, much worse, flies to compete with Brekke's Wirenth as she also rises. Both riders lose their dragons. Kylara is exiled with other Oldtimer rebels the South, where she lives imprisoned in her own guilt. Dragonriders do not take human lives, so indignant calls for further punishment including Kylara's execution, are of no avail.

Lessa

The Dragonwoman of Benden Weyr, Lessa is the sole surviving member of the proud bloodline of Ruatha Hold. Lessa ceases to belong to the Hold when dragonmen F'lar and F'nor choose her to Impress and ride a hatchling queen dragon, Ramoth. At this point, Lessa steps aside in favor of 12-year-old Lord Jaxom. Dainty, white-skinned, and dark-haired, with flashing gray eyes and an acerbic tongue, Lessa is "permanently attached" to F'lar. Together they have one child, Felessan, who is being brought up by a foster mother according to the planet's tradition. Lessa longs to be pregnant again, but a side effect of jumps between is an inability to carry babies to term.

Seven years before the novel begins, Lessa discovers that dragons can fly between time as well as place, and risks her life and that of Ramoth to go backward 400 turns and recruit valiant dragonmen bored with inactivity to defend, once again, their planet. This trip, which achieves the status of legend in Lessa's lifetime, restores the Weys to six and allows Thread to be fought. Soon, the Oldtimers prove unable or unwilling to accept the many changes that have taken place on Pern, Lessa feels responsible and guilty. After F'lar is wounded in a knife fight with Lord T'ron, Lessa worries that he will go between to the Red Planet as the Lords demand. She, therefore, sets up his half-brother F'nor to undertake the hazardous journey.



Andemon

The Masterfarmer of Nerat Hold, Andemon has always believed - and acted on that belief - that grubs must be exterminated. This is based on a misunderstanding of an ancient Record that calls for "watching" them, and results in Perm enduring for unnecessary centuries the scourge of Thread. Andemon is converted to the new approach of grubbing every arable part of Pern to immunize it against Thread, but knows his fellow farmers share his revulsion and would sooner be beholden to magnificent dragons than to grubs.

Canth

A brown-colored dragon ridden by F'nor, Wing-second of Benden Weyr, Canth is the largest, strongest brown on the planet Pern. Canth has a knack for spotting good candidates for fighting dragons and breeding queens and is fortuitously playful, taking them to cavort at a Southern beach where a nest of fire lizards is hatching. Canth introduces F'nor to one hatchling that F'nor impresses and names Grall. Canth accepts that Grall is a living representative of his race's predecessors and they become inseparable. At the novel's climax, Canth accepts coordinates from F'nor to a specific location on the Red Star and caught is with him in a terrible fiery maelstrom that critically injures both and nearly kills them. Canth communicates the horror to everyone on Pern, and the dragons rally to save the pair as it plummets toward the ground. Badly burned and scarred, Canth is expected to fly again and fight Thread with added inspiration.

Fandarel

The massive and intelligent Mastersmith at Smithcrafthall, Telgar Hold, Fandarel comes up with a solution to Perm's communications problems, producing an instrument that works like a telegraph: the "distance-writer." Masterharper Robinton, who has been using a drum code to transmit Thread warnings and happily provides the Morse-like code, suggests that they use a wedding at Telgar Hold to demonstrate Fandarel's system, and he is given help in stringing the wire needed. The demonstration is more than a success - Fandarel receives word of an actual Thread attack to which the dragonriders immediately respond. The message, however, cuts off abruptly when the uninsulated wire is burned and severed. Fandarel sets to work on various forms of insulation. He also improves on the F'lar's primitive means of collecting Thread.

Groghe

A burly, indefatigable, conservative, and floridly tempered nobleman, Groghe rules Fort Hold and has every inhabitant of the valley planting his crops rather than standing watch against Thread. At the end of the novel, Groghe accepts proof that grubs are efficient defense against Thread but dislikes the unromantic idea, preferring to be beholden to



noble dragons that lowly insects. He declares he is too old to change, but concedes the progressive Weyrleader F'lar rules the planet.

Jaxom

The 12-year-old Lord of Ruatha, Jaxom becomes the ward of Lytol, a former dragonrider whose beloved mount dies years ago, after the death of both his infamous father, Fax of the High Reaches, and his mother, Gemma from Crom Hold. Lessa, the legendary Dragonwoman of Benden Weyr and last full-blooded Ruathan, steps aside in Jaxom's favor. Jaxom does not understand these things but knows he must. When Jaxom and his slightly younger friend Felessan, F'lar and Lessa's only child, explore the tunnels beneath Benden Weyr, Jaxom makes the faux pas of touching a dragon egg, and when it fails to hatch properly, he feels guilty. Seeing it begin to crack and the dragonet struggling to get loose with none of the chosen candidates for Impressing paying any attention, Jaxom springs to the rescue. He names the undersized white hatchling Ruth. No one expects the beast to survive. Jaxom's fellow Lord Holders debate whether the pair should remain at the Weyr or return to Ruatha. They assail him over the trouble he is causing, creating dynastic complications, but Jaxom stands firm and keeps Ruth as an overgrown lizard. His first obligation is to blood and hold. Thanks to Lytol's teachings, Jaxom honors dragonkind, and his rescue of Ruth flows from that.

Lytol

The Lord Warder for underaged Lord Holder Jaxom of Ruatha Hold, Lytol is a former dragonrider. The death of his beloved brown dragon Larth sends him into a lifelong depression. After working as a craftsman, Lytol accepts the duty of bringing up Jaxom after both his parents die. Lytol is strict but kind with the young Lord. After Jaxom Impresses the undersized white hatchling Ruth, Lytol defends him against other Lord Holders. He claims he is responsible for the boy's actions and upholds his right to Ruth.

Meron

The ruthless, ambitious Lord Holder of Nabol, Meron is the object of Weyrwoman Kylara's lust. To seduce him she gives him a full nest of fire lizard eggs that she has found and instructs him and his men how to Impress them. Meron and Kylara are having sex at his Hold when her queen dragon Prideth goes into heat, savages the prize livestock of Nabol, and flies off to seduce the bronze dragons that are gathering to mate with Brekke's queen, Wirenth. In the ensuing battle, both queens die. Already despised by his fellow Lord Holders, Meron receives part of the blame. Nevertheless, he attends the unveiling of a newly discovered telescope and quickly monopolizes it. Meron sharply criticizes F'lar for not mounting an expedition to the Red Star to deal once and for all with Thread at its source. Closely watched by F'lar's men, Meron is seen yelling at his fire dragon, leading to suspicions he intends to send it between to the Red Star.



After a confrontation with N'ton, Meron is summarily led away and transported home to virtual exile.

Mnementh

A magnificent bronze-colored dragon ridden by F'lar, Mnementh flies the young Queen Ramoth in her first mating. They remain inseparable.

N'ton

A Wingleader at Benden Weyr, N'ton is a rising star earmarked for leadership at Fort Weyr after the exile of T'ron and other Oldtimers. F'lar takes N'ton into his inner circle while F'nor is preoccupied with nursing Brekke back to life. His first mission is to collect grubs at Southern Weyr, evading the sentries newly posted. N'ton proves adept at covert operations. He collects Thread for experimentation and keeps the suspicious Lord Holder Meron of Nabol under surveillance, eventually confronting him in a curt manner and sending him into virtual exile.

Prideth

Kylara's golden dragon queen, Prideth wants to mate with the magnificent bronze dragon Mnementh, but refuses to contend with Queen Ramoth, his mate. Prideth grows disgusted with her rider's wanton liaison with the ruthless, ambitious Lord Meron of Nabol, particularly after he impresses a fire lizard hatchling. On the verge of going into heat, Prideth is flown to Meron's Hold and left improperly attended. She rises, attacks Nabol's prized livestock, and then heads to where Brekke's queen, Wirenth, has for the first time risen. They fight savagely high in the sky and when Prideth gets a mortal grip on Wirenth's throat, Wirenth goes between, dragging Prideth with her. Both die.

Ramoth

A mature golden dragon queen, Ramoth is flown by Lessa, the legendary Dragonwoman of Benden Weyr. Ramoth's mate is Mnementh, who is ridden by Lessa's mate, the Weyrleader F'lar. Ramoth spends most of the novel checking on her latest brood of eggs, including another queen. Movement in the Hatching Ground easily upsets her. After the eggs hatch, Ramoth and Mnementh sit proudly atop the rim of the Weyr, presiding over the celebration. Lessa hopes it will be a long time before Ramoth again gets the urge to mate.

Robinton

The Masterharper at Harpercraft Hall, For Hold, Robinton composes ballads with a political edge for events like the wedding at Telgar. He has invented a drum code to



send early warnings about Threadfall and posts lookouts. When Mastersmith Fandarel invents a "distance-writer" (telegraph), Robinton provides the Morse-like code. Robinton is well known for his love of wine, particularly that of Benden Weyr. Lessa also suspects he is a skilled dissembler, able to appear amicably drunk while being in control of his faculties. They become friends and he may well harbor romantic intentions towards her. Robinton becomes a member of F'lar's inner circle, helping mediate among the many feuding leaders.

T'bor

The short-tempered, stubborn Southern Weyrleader and rider of Orth, T'bor is a fine dragonrider and successful leader. He looks instinctively to his old friend F'lar for direction and companionship. F'lar is sure that sensual, blonde Kylara has made T'bor touchy. At an emergency meeting of Weyrleaders, T'bor is F'lar's only ally, opposing T'ron's contention that the victims of extortion and stabbing are the primary causes of a "disgraceful public brawl." T'bor is indignant and has to be calmed, and agrees with F'lar that, since they alone understand the situation, Benden and Southern Weyrs must work together to bring the Oldtimers around. When T'ron and most of the other Oldtimers are exiled to the South, T'bor takes over High Reaches.

Terry

Fandarel's trusted assistant, Terry is victimized by rogue dragonriders B'naj and T'reb, who stab Wing-second F'nor when he intervenes. As the plan to show the Holders how communication can enhance their security develops, F'lar and Lessa visit the workshop and find Terry an enthusiastic proponent of cooperation. He has seen riders from every Weyr and appreciates all that the Oldtimers have done, fighting Thread, but declares them "heart-tired, bone-tired," and hopes they can be swept aside to make way for a final victory over Thread. F'lar admits he has never seen this perspective.

T'ron

An Oldtimer Weyrleader at Fort Weyr, T'ron is F'lar's harshest critic and opponent. At an emergency meeting of Weyrleaders, T'ron defends his men's stabbing of F'lor, making it appear he is the primary cause of a "disgraceful public brawl." During the celebration of the wedding at Telgar, while all scramble to respond to a Thread alert, T'ron declares he has had it with Benden Weyr and its leader and pulls a knife on F'lar. Agile for his age and size, T'ron slashes F'lar's belly but leaves himself open for a downward thrust into his chest. He is evacuated to Southern Weyr as the Oldtimers go into exile there, and is reported to have survived. An Oldtimer Weyrleader at Fort Weyr, T'ron is F'lar's harshest critic and opponent. At an emergency meeting of Weyrleaders, T'ron defends his men's stabbing of F'lor, making it appear he is the primary cause of a "disgraceful public brawl." During the celebration of the wedding at Telgar, while all scramble to respond to a Thread alert, T'ron declares he has had it with Benden Weyr and its leader and pulls a



knife on F'lar. Agile for his age and size, T'ron slashes F'lar's belly but leaves himself open for a downward thrust into his chest. He is evacuated to Southern Weyr as the Oldtimers go into exile there, and is reported to have survived.

Wirenth

Brekke's young golden dragon queen, Wirenth attains sexual maturity and goes into heat, but her rider does not know how to control her. Wirenth goes into the usual blood frenzy before soaring into the sky with bronze suitors in pursuit. At the height of her flight, she sees Kylara's queen, Prideth, also in heat, trying to lure away the bronzes, and bears down on her in a fury. They plummet towards the ground in mortal combat, separate, but come back together. When Prideth gains a mortal grip on Wirenth's throat, Wirenth takes them both between and they die. Brekke, who experiences the entire fight vicariously, becomes suicidally depressed but recovers.



Objects/Places

Between

An "area of nothingness and sensory deprivation between here and there" (glossary, pg. 320), *between* (always italicized) describes the state when dragons instantaneously jump in space or time. It is brutally cold in *between*, which is useful for freezing Threads that attach to dragons or riders, before they can gnaw into flesh. Extended time spent in *between* is also effective in aborting pregnancies, a bane to Lessa, who yearns for a second child, but a boon to Kylara, who has born five children and wants to enjoy her promiscuity without care.

Dragons

Named after the mythical Terran beast they resemble, dragons are a species native to Pern, believed by some to have evolved from tiny fire lizards through the process of selective breeding. Dragons live in extinct volcanoes called "Weysr." They have enormous wings; long, sinuous necks; gleaming, opalescent, multi-faceted eyes; razor-sharp talons; soft, sensitive hide, and long tails. get from place to place instantly through the *between*. They emit a noxious flaming gas after chewing phosphine-bearing rock, which they use to char Thread in mid-air. Whoever feeds them immediately after they hatch and welcomes them lovingly into the world is said to "Impress" them, beginning a life-long intimate relationship.

Dragons communicate by telepathy, over vast distances, if need be, among themselves and with their own riders. In rare cases, humans can hear all dragons. Dragons never hurt human beings, but the Pernese fear them superstitiously, which causes dragons confusion. The death of a dragon or a rider leaves the survivor depressed and often suicidal. As they mature, dragons have little sense of past or future, but live in an eternal present. Color determines a dragon's place in the strict hierarchy. Queens are golden and mate only with large and powerful bronze males. Browns are somewhat smaller and bear the brunt of combat. F'nor, who rides a massive brown, believes mating with queens should be open to browns. Blues and greens serve as messengers and burden bearers. When dragons come into heat, their hides glow brightly and it is dangerous for them to be outside the Weyr, for they become crazed and their emotions spread to other dragons and other species including humans. Dramatically, two queens "rise" simultaneously, fight over the pool of bronze males, and go to their deaths *between*, locked in mortal combat.

Firestone

A phosphine-rich mineral that dragons chew to produce flame, firestone also causes temporary sterility in female dragons.



Hold

Places where the common folk live, Holds are autocratically ruled by hereditary "Lord Holders" and bound to the Weyrs that protect them from Threadfall. Fort Hold is the oldest, protected by Fort Weyr and ruled by Groghe. It holds many artifacts of historical and scientific interest. Also protected by Fort Weyr are Ruatha, ruled by youthful Jaxom (and his Warder Lytol) and Southern Boll Hold, ruled by Sangel. Benden Weyr protects Benden Hold (Raid and Toronas), Bitra Hold (Sifer and Sigomal), and Lemos Hold (Asgenar). High Reaches Weyr protects High Reaches Hold (Bargen), Nabol Hold (Fax, Meron, and Deckter), and Tillek Hold (Oterel). Igen Weyr protects Ista Hold (Warbret), Igen Hold (Laudey), and Nerat Hold (Vicet and Begamon). Telgar Weyr protects Telgar Hold (Larad) and Crom Hold (Nessel). Southern Weyr protects only Southern Hold (Holder Toric).

Numbweed

A medicinal salve used as an anesthetic, particularly to reduce the pain caused by contact with Threads, numbweed is produced in a noxious process, by boiling chopped leaves in great vats. The womenfolk and older children are in charge while the menfolk find excuses to escape the nauseating clouds.

Pern

The third world of the golden star Rukbat, Pern is a lush, beautiful pastoral place inhabited by humans. The Pernese lose all memory of Earth as their mother planet as they cannibalize their transport ships, abandon technological sophistication, and take up a simple farming life. In roughly fifty-year cycles, however, they find themselves menaced by the falling from the sky of Threads, a dangerous mycorrhizoid spore that sloughs off the Red Star whenever its erratic orbit gets too close to Pern's - and when other planets' gravitational forces do not protect Pern. When they attack, Thread devour organic matter, and reproduce rapidly if they are able to burrow underground. The Pernese breed Dragons to char Threads in mid-air. The mountainous Southern Continent has long been abandoned because of infestation. Holds develop wherever natural caves are found. In them, people hide during Thread attacks and emerge to replant and stock up in between. Because they alone can save Pern, the Dragonmen attain great prestige, but when planetary alignments protect Pern for five generations, the Pernese grow complacent, spread out to farm, and let all but one Weyr die out. The heroic dragonmen fall into disfavor. As another infestation draws near, Dragonwoman Lessa riding Ramoth travels back in time to recruit fighters from the five Weyrs that have faded. Conflicts arise, however, between these Oldtimers and the present day powers that be.



Red Star

Not a true star but a stray planet captured by the gravitational tug of the star Rukbat, the Red Star occupies a highly erratic orbit. When it is far from the inhabited planet Pern, no Thread fall, but when they swing close, on a roughly fifty-year cycle, because of the Red Star's highly elliptical orbit, Thread obliterates plant life on Pern. Only with the discovery of an ancient but workable "distance-viewer" (telescope) does the face of the Red Star reveal itself. It consists of gray and darker regions with white polar caps. Most of the time, heavy cloud cover obscures the surface. The Lord Holders of Pern call for an expedition to the Red Star to wipe out Thread at its source. F'lar wonders why earlier generations of dragonriders have not attempted this and suspects that if they have (without leaving records) they perish. Because dragons can jump between time and space only when given precise coordinates, the mission cannot go forward until the Red Star's cloud cover abates. One night, F'nor sees the clouds form into a fist and then resolve into a dragon's eye; these data suffice for his dragon to take them there, but they nearly die in the broiling tornadic winds that sweep the molten surface.

Rukbat

A golden G-type star in the Sagittarian Sector, Rukbat has five planets, two asteroid belts, and a stray planet, which occupies a highly elliptical orbit that at perihelion threatens the inhabited third planet, Pern.

Thread

Dangerous mycorrhizoid spores that devour organic matter, Threads fall on Pern, burrow underground, and reproduce rapidly. The Pernese breed Dragons to intercept and char them in mid-air. Contact with Threads causes painful wounds that scar. Immediate freezing by a dragon's entering the between kills the spores before they can penetrate deep into vital organs. Threads fall only when Pern and the Red Star are in close proximity - and when the gravitation forces of other bodies in the Rukbat system do not interfere. Calendars of expected times and places for attacks have long been prepared, but during the action of this novel, the insensate Threads deviate from the pattern in a worrisome fashion. This leads to the discovery that on the Southern continent wherever grubs are present in the soil, Thread does not burrow and vegetation spontaneously recovers from charring. Experiments confirm that Southern grubs can survive in Northern soil and rapidly consume live Thread introduced to their environment. This opens the door to grubbing the Northern continent, which farmers ignorantly have been keeping grub-free.



Turn

"Turn" designates a Pernese year; 200 of them constitute an "interval," and double that constitutes a "long interval," during which no Thread falls, and the dragonmen decrease in importance and numbers. A Pernese week is called a "Sevenday."

Weyr

The home of dragons and their riders, Weyrs are extinct volcanoes located strategically around the Northern continent of Pern, to provide protection against Threadfall. "Weyr-" is used as a prefix in an honorific manner, setting the -rider, -leader, etc., apart from the common folk of the Holds and Crafts. The Weyrs of Pern in order of founding are Fort, Benden, High Reaches, Igen, Ista, Telgar, and Southern. Benden alone survives the 400 years in which Thread fails to fall and the need for dragons is diminished. When Pern again is threatened, Lessa braves a jump between time to recruit the ancient warriors and bring them back to reconstitute the six Weyrs. The Oldtimers, unfortunately, cannot adapt to modern times and cause trouble for the progressive F'lar of Benden Weyr, the contemporary leader. The Oldtimers eventually are exiled to the Southern continent and left to their own devices, and the Weyrs agree to cooperate in the common fight, communicating openly with each other and with the Holds and Crafts.



Themes

Tradition

Dragonquest paints tradition as a negative force in society. It creates and perpetuates class stratification, struggle, and prejudice; stubborn resistance to change even when the old ways are shown not to be working efficiently and newly proven and scientifically established facts indicate a better way; irrational fears, unfounded jealousies, the repression of rights; and destructive isolation. In some cases, there may have been valid bases for certain customs. As dragons evolve from tiny fire dragons, five subspecies evolve, and it is in the common interest, given the urgent need for dragons to fight Threadfall, that ever larger, stronger, smarter, and faster individuals be produced. This leads to the tradition that massive golden queens mate exclusively with the largest bronze males. Eventually, however, this selective breeding brings dragonkind overall to an optimal size, and excluding browns, which are only slightly smaller, no longer makes sense. Barring female riders from combat also becomes self-defeating.

The worst case is when misunderstandings become perpetuated, and tradition causes regression. An ancient text advises farmers to "watch" grubs. Without warrant, they interpret this to mean exterminating any grub "infestation" they encounter, even if it means torching valuable farmlands and forests. It occurs to enlightened leaders, who discover a correlation between the presence of grubs in Southern soils and an absence of Thread burrowing, that this is not the ancient intent. Farmers have spent some 400 turns (years) actively working against the interests of the planet. By this point, humans have an intense revulsion for the insects and refuse to believe they rather than the noble dragons could be their true saviors. Re-educating them will be a long, slow process, and may well require the dying out of the last Oldtimers.

Scientific Method

Dragonquest shows a world in which ancient records have been lost or preserved only in ill-understood fragments. Myth replaces knowledge. It takes several chance happenings for a "eureka" to occur (and the finders do not understand the ancient word when they read it). Two playful boys happen upon a long-forgotten chamber in which are found various instruments including a microscope. From looking at a hair under magnification, adults intuit that if small objects can be made large, distant ones ought to be able to be brought close enough for careful study. A systematic search ensues in the most likely repository and an ancient "distance-viewer" (telescope) is found in working order. Long hours studying the face of the Red Star, long suspected to be the origin of destructive Thread, brings frustration but ultimately the data needed for a trip there through between which proves Thread cannot be fought there.



Simultaneously, Threadfall on the Southern continent leads to the discovery that Thread does not burrow there and burnt foliage spontaneously repairs itself. Digging reveals repulsive grubs. The finder brings some back North, determines the grubs can survive in Northern soil and not damage selective Northern flora (an untreated control tub is used), and live Thread introduced to the tubs are indeed quickly and completely consumed. Finally, a brave Lord Holder allows his valuable stand of timber to be used as a field test. Four times the ground to which a large concentration of grubs is added withstands Threadfall and the char damage begins to heal. The investigators seek the advice of Masterfarmer Andemon, whose revulsion over grubs leads to the discovery that an ancient test advising farmers to "watch" grubs has for 400 years been interpreted to mean exterminate them. Changing attitudes will be slow, but Pern has relearned the scientific method.

Sexuality

Dragonquest uses the character of Brekke to examine sexuality. She is brought up a simple country girl, imbibing traditional morality, but then Impresses a queen hatchling and bonds with her for life. Traditional mores do not apply in the Weyr as is most pointedly demonstrated in the openly wanton Kylara. As Queen Wirenth reaches sexual maturity, Brekke has heard about the draconic facts of life, but her spirit rebels. Other queen riders assure her it is a wonderful thing.

When a queen goes into heat, she first experiences an intense blood lust, which puts any nearby livestock in mortal danger. She then swiftly "rises" into the air, leaving her rider behind. Male bronze dragons, the only ones allowed to mate with queens, follow her into the stratosphere. All of their riders are possessed by the sexual passion that overcomes them and act out the aerial dance. The queen's rider and the successful bronze's rider mate and become the Weyr's leaders until the next round of mating occurs. Some dragons pair for life and, therefore, so do their riders.

It appears that dragons in heat give off pheromones that cause not only other dragons but other species - including humans - to go crazy and turn violent. Therefore, riders have an obligation to sequester their dragons as the time approaches. They receive a warning when the dragons' color greatly intensifies, but the need to "rise" can come on quite swiftly. Inexperienced Brekke does not react swiftly enough when Wirenth begins to rise for the first time, and Kylara has let her own lust for the Lord Holder Meron of Nabol to cloud her judgment. She flies her queen Prideth to Nabol when she is showing signs of coming into heat and leaves her untended in a field. The change comes over Prideth in an instant. She falls on Meron's prized herdbeasts and flies off toward the sounds of a mating frenzy. Finding Wirenth high above the bronzes, Prideth attempts to poach the suitors and the two queens end up in a deadly battle that leads to both their deaths. Dragon sexuality is not a subject to be taken lightly.



Style

Point of View

Dragonquest is a major work of science fiction by an accomplished master of the genre. The book is nominated for a Hugo Award for Best Novel in 1972. The author, Anne McCaffrey, is hailed on the cover above the title as "Queen of the Dragons," and is described as a frequent lecturer, guest-of-honor at science fiction conventions, and the winner of some of the genre's most prestigious awards, the Hugo and the Nebula. Dragonquest is It is Volume 2 in the fourteen-volume The Dragonriders of Pern® series. Born in Cambridge, MA, and graduating cum laude from Radcliffe, she works in theater before turning to writing. She lives in County Wicklow, Ireland, in a house of her own design, "Dragonhold-Underhill."

McCaffrey utilizes no narrator in telling a forthright adventure story on a distant planet colonized long ago by human beings whose descendants have reverted to a feudal agrarian society. The author knows their history, but they have forgotten most of it. She knows all the mysteries of their world and solar system, but allows the character and, through them, the reader, to discover how everything fits together, usually in contrast to the established ways of thinking that an uncritical and incomplete tradition has passed down.

Much of Dragonquest has a detective feel to it as characters quest for truth. The science of this planet is developed effectively, suggesting that humans learn to take ecology seriously and rediscover the scientific method. There is also a strong fantasy element, as the major characters include flying, fire breathing dragons and the riders who care for and communicate with them. The character's minds and hearts, human and draconian, are open to the narrator and thus the reader. Dialog is used heavily to allow them to express themselves.

Setting

Dragonquest is set on Pern is a lush, beautiful pastoral place inhabited by humans. The Pernese have lost all memory of Earth as their mother planet as they cannibalize their transport ships, abandon technological sophistication that sounds much like that of the time the novel is published (1971) or perhaps a bit later. At least 400 turns (Pernese years) have passed since the initial colonization. The social organization is feudal. Most Pernese are common folk living a simple agrarian lifestyle. Crafts are organized to provide goods and services. Most Pernese inhabit a vast northern hemisphere, where they are autocratically ruled by aristocratic "Lord Holders." Each sovereign Hold is bound to an equally sovereign Weyr that protects it from a mysterious plague that falls on him or her from space: Thread. The Southern hemisphere, separated by ocean, has same social structure but is more autonomous. Most people there live on eastern shore



and the mountainous interior has yet to be explored. Southern vegetation tends to be lush, and the region is rarely attacked by Thread.

The source of this menace is traditionally held to be a mysterious neighboring planet called the Red Sun. When its erratic orbit approaches Pern's, burning threadlike spores fall in patches that scorch anything in its path and burrow into the ground to reproduce and spread. Weyrs are the habitations of dragons, native animals that closely resemble the mythological beings on Earth. Over centuries, they have been bred to enormous size from the elusive race of fire lizards that still exist. Dragonriders form an aristocracy rivaling the Lord Holders and they are generally envied or even hated.

Language and Meaning

Dragonquest is told in a rich language befitting the feudalistic setting. It is narrated in the past tense in lucid contemporary English, employing contractions. Dialog is extensive and the dragons' projected thoughts are set in italics. The novel includes a plethora of made-up compound words, easily understood, that apply to the life of these feudal agrarian people. A fifteen-page long "Dragondex" at the back of the book helps the reader cope with all the proper and place names and various cultural terms, including the verb "Impress," in all its tenses and in compounds. The dragonriders' names all consist of a consonant, an apostrophe, and three more letters; later in the novel, it is explained that this is an honorific given them when they Impress a dragon. The ways time is divided up is the most confusing, but the reader settles in quickly. All cultural institutions are capitalized.

Most of the novel deals with the need for passé institutions to give way to the dictates of reality. "Oldtimers" dominate Holds, Crafts, and Weyrs equally, but only one Weyr (abode of dragons and their riders) has a progressive leader, F'lar. He is frustrated by stodgy tradition and prior to the action of the novel has withdrawn. Pressed back into leadership, he labors to show that the ancients possess a great deal of wisdom, which has been lost because much of it is hoarded by an elite or consigned to animal skins which have disintegrated, resigning Pern to needless suffering over centuries. When a workable, albeit non-spectacular, to the Thread menace is found, F'lar demonstrates it to reluctant, prejudiced leaders, who will have to reeducate their followers. F'lar expects the "Oldtimers" will have to die out before true progress is made.

Structure

Dragonquest consists of a prelude, sixteen numbered chapters, and a "Dragondex" consisting of a number of useful tables. It includes a map of Pern that is of some value. Chapters are headed not true chapter titles, but time markers indicating the timeframe of the action in the location(s) named. Such action often takes place simultaneously over several continental time zones. An example is Chapter 1's "Morning at Mastercrafthall, Fort Hold / Several Afternoons Later at Benden Weyr / Mid-morning (Telgar Time) at Mastersmithcrafthall, Telgar Hold." The chapters generally unfold in



chronological order, although in several cases events occurring simultaneously to different sets of characters are dealt with in separate chapters, back-to-back.

There are many references to a critical event occurring seven years before the current action, when Lessa, the Dragonwoman of Benden Weyr, rides her dragon back in time 400 "turns" (Pernese years) by jumping through the "between" to locate the great dragonriders of a golden era. She brings them back to the present to beef up an attenuated fighting force that faces a renewed planetary scourge. The event deserves multiple allusions and finally a major treatment because it forms the foundation of Lessa's reputation and the highlight of her mate's leadership of the Weyrs. It also occasions considerable ongoing conflict, as the "Oldtimers" vehemently resist 400 turns' worth of cultural change. The Lord Holders also fixate on F'lar's "three-day miracle" and demand another instant fix, forcing a nearly fatal trip to the neighboring Red Star.

The extended "Prelude" explains how Pern comes to be in its current situation. It summarizes the situation at the end of *Dragonflight*, which forms Volume 1 in Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern*® series. *Dragonquest* is Volume 2, set seven years. Obviously intended to be helpful to the reader, the "Prelude" is rather terse and at times confusing. The novel proper provides all the contextualization needed for the reader to understand and enjoy it.



Quotes

"Now a well-stated martial theme would do for Benden's Weyleader, with his keen amber eyes, his unconscious superiority, the intense energy of his lean fighter's frame. Could he, Robinton, rouse F'lar from his detachment? Or was he perhaps unnecessarily worried about these minor irritations between Lord Holder and Weyleader? But without the dragonriders of Pern, the land would be sucked dry of any sustenance by Thread, even if every man, woman and child of the planet were armed with flame throwers. One burrow, well established, could race across plain and forest as fast as a dragon could fly it, consuming everything that grew or lived, save solid rock, water or metal. Robinton shook his head, annoyed with his own fancies. As if dragonmen would ever desert Pern and their ancient obligation." Chapter 1, pgs. 4-5.

"And it was practical diplomacy to invite Holders and Crafters to Impressions. There wasn't a man alive in Pern who hadn't secretly cherished the notion that he might be able to Impress a dragon. That he could be linked for life to the love and sustaining admiration of these gentle great beasts. That he could traverse Pern in a twinkling, astride a dragon. That he would never suffer the loneliness that was the condition of most men - a dragonrider always had his dragon. So, whether the commoners had a relative on the Hatching Ground hoping to attach a dragonet or not, the spectators enjoyed the vicarious thrill of being present, at witnessing this 'mysterious rite.'" Chapter 2, pg. 20.

"Why, you big lump of sand, do you realize what that means? Those legends are true. You were bred from something as small as her!"

"I don't remember, Canth replied, but something in his tone made F'nor realize that the big beast's draconic complacency was a little shaken.

"F'nor grinned and stroked Canth's muzzle affectionately. 'How could you, big one? When we - men - have lost so much knowledge and we can record what we know.'

"There are other ways of remembering important matters, Canth replied.

"Just imagine being able to breed tiny fire lizards into a creature the size of you!' He was awed, knowing how long it had taken to breed faster landbeasts.

"Canth rumbled restlessly I am useful. She is not." Chapter 4, pg. 70.

"She wondered why she'd bothered to sweat and toil and bring him a gift, an opportunity which he was obviously unable to accept or appreciate. And yet, if she had a gold and he a bronze, when they mated it ought to be worth her troubles. 'Shut out any thought of fear or profit,' she told the listening circle. 'The first puts a dragon off, the second he can't understand. As soon as one will approach you, feed it. Keep feeding it. Get it on your hand, if possible, and move to a quiet corner and keep feeding it. Think how much you love it, want it to stay with you, how happy its presence makes you. Think of nothing else or the fire lizard will go between. There's just the short time between its hatching and its first big meal in which to make Impression. You succeed or you don't. it's up to you.'" Chapter 6, pg. 114.



"F'lar brushed his forelock back from his eyes in an irritated movement. This was the most unhealthy development. A dragon displeased with her rider? The one restraint they had all counted on was Kylara's bond with Prideth. The woman wouldn't be fool enough, wanton enough, perverted enough to strain that, too, in her egocentric selfishness.

"Prideth will not hear me, Mnementh said suddenly. She will not hear Orth. She is unhappy. That isn't good.

"Threads falling unexpectedly, fire lizards n Holder hands, a dragon displeased with her rider and another anticipating his rider's questions! And F'lar had thought he'd had problems seven Turns ago!" Chapter 8, pg. 149.

"He patted her shoulder and sighed exaggeratedly. 'And craftbred as well. Have you taken in nothing you've been told about dragonfolk? Weyrwomen can't be bound by an commoner moralities. A Weyrwoman has to be subservient to her queen's needs, including mating with many riders if her queen is flown by different dragons. Most craft and holdbred girls envy such freedom...'

"'Of that I'm all too aware,' Brekke said and her body seemed to resent his touch.

"'Does Wirenth object to me?'

"'Oh, no,' and Brekke looked startled. 'I meant - oh, I don't know what I meant. I love Wirenth, but can't you understand? I'm not Weyrbred. I don't have that kind of - of - wantonness in my nature. I'm - I'm inhibited. There! I said it. I am inhibited and I'm terrified that I'll inhibit Wirenth. I can't change all of me to conform to Weyr customs. I'm the way I am.'" Chapter 9, pg. 160.

"'I've had enough of Benden! Benden's notions! Benden's superiority! Benden's altruism! And Benden's Weyrleader...'

"With that last snarled insult, T'ron launched himself toward F'lar, his drawn knife raised for a slashing blow.

"As the ragged gasp of fear swept through the ranks of spectators, F'lar held his ground until there was no chance T'ron could change his direction. Then he ducked under the blade, yanking his own out of its ornamental sheath.

"It was a new knife, a gift from Lessa. It had cut neither meat nor bread and must now be christened with the blood of a man. For this duel was to the death and its outcome could well decide the fate of Pern." Chapter 10, pg. 187.

"Suddenly she hissed, craning her head sideways, over her right shoulder, while her face reflected incredulity, horror, hatred. As suddenly, her body was seized with a massive convulsion. She screamed again, this time a mortal shriek of unbelievable terror and anguish. One hand went to her throat, the other batted at some unseen attacker. Her body, poised on her toes, strained in an agonized stretch. With a cry that was more gasp than scream, she whirled. In her eyes was Brekke's soul again, tortured, terrified. Then her eyes closed, her body sagged in such an alarming collapse that F'nor barely caught her in time.

"The stones of the Weyr itself seemed to reverberate with the mourning dirge of the dragons." Chapter 12, pg. 225.



"But it's so obvious. Surely you can all see that,' Meron replied with malicious affability and a feigned surprise at the obtuseness of the others. 'He has a hopeless passion for - the Benden Weyrwoman.'

"For a moment Lessa could only stare at the man in a stunned daze. It was true that she admired and respected Robinton. She was fond of him, she supposed. Always glad to see him and never bothering to disguise it but - Meron was mad. Trying to undermine the country's faith in dragonmen with absurd, vicious rumors. First Kylara and now ... And yet Kylara's weakness, her promiscuity, the general attitude of the Hold and Craft toward the customs of the Weyrs made this accusation so plausible...

"Robinton's hearty guffaw startled her. And wiped the smile from Nabol's face.

'Benden's Weyrwoman has not half the attraction for me that Benden's wine has!'" Chapter 13, pg. 242.

"You mean, that if the ancients knew they couldn't get to the Red Star,' Lessa exclaimed, 'they developed the grubs to protect growing fields?'

'They developed the dragons from fire lizards, didn't they? Why not grubs as ground crews?' And N'ton grinned at the whimsy of his thesis.

'That makes sense,' Lessa said, looking hopefully at F'lar. 'Certainly that explains why the dragons haven't jumped between to the Red Star. They didn't need to. Protection was being provided.'" Chapter 13, pgs. 253-254.

"Those grubs - yes, they devoured Thread before it could burrow and proliferate. But they were repulsive to look at and commanded neither respect nor gratitude. They weren't obvious, or awesome, like dragons. People wouldn't see grubs devouring Thread. They wouldn't have the satisfaction of watching dragons flame, sear, char, destroy Thread mid-air before the vicious stuff got to earth. Surely F'lar realized this, knew that men must have the visible proof of Thread's defeat. Would dragonmen become tokens? No! That would make dragonfolk more parasitic than Thread. Such an expedient would be repugnant, insupportable to a man of F'lar's integrity. But what had he in mind?

"The grubs might be the ultimate answer but not - particularly after thousands of Turns of conditioning - not an answer acceptable to Pernese, Holder, Crafter, commoner and dragonman." Chapter 15, pg. 289.

"Dragons belong on Perm!' Corman said and honked his big nose for emphasis.

"Indeed they do, Lord Corman. Be assured that there'll always be dragons in the Weyrs of Pern. It is, after all, their home.' F'lar raised his arm in greeting and farewell and bronze Mnementh lifted him skyward." Chapter 16, pg. 315.



Topics for Discussion

How does Brekke demonstrate the differences in morality between Weyr and common folk?

How do Lessa and Kylara differ as they leave Hold for Weyr?

Is the loss of Wirenth inevitable? What might have been done to prevent the tragedy?

How does F'nor's stabbing affect the Pernese?

How does F'lar's wounding affect finding a deterrent to Thread?

How does the tragedy of the dragon queens and the plunge to earth of F'nor and Canth compare and contrast?

How does the boys' chance finding of hidden rooms change the fate of a planet?

What is the role of Beth, the white dragonet?