

# Dragonsdawn Short Guide

## Dragonsdawn by Anne McCaffrey

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Dragonsdawn Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns/Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Key Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>



# Characters

In accordance with McCaffrey's environmental theme, the principal "character" is Pern itself. The novel opens with the sending of mobile probes down to the planet's surface to study its complex ecosystems and to plan for the impact of Earth biology on Pern.

McCaffrey pairs the main human characters in the novel, either linking them as companions or using them as foils in illustrating aspects of Pern society. The first dyad is Admiral Paul Benden and Governor Emily Boll.

Strong leaders in the FSP and the only characters that retain their former titles, they are united in their desire to forget their past sacrifices to a dying system, in their mutual respect for each other's strength, and in their hope to see the Pern colony prosper. While Benden and Boll are not official leaders in Landing (the first settlement), in emergencies the colonists look to them for guidance.

The second pair is Sorka Hanrahan and Sean Connell. These two are Irish children; Sean is from a tinker family and Sorka is from a middle-class family (her father is a veterinarian, her mother is a child-care professional).

Both children exhibit the sharp-wittedness and sense of unity that will promote the survival of Pern. Sean and Sorka grow up together, marry, and share a love for animals, particularly horses. McCaffrey grooms them to be Pern's first dragonriders and future leaders.

In the third dyad, McCaffrey contrasts Sallah Telgar and Avril Bitra, doubling the impact of an almost archetypal theme from pioneering life and tales: the expulsion from Eden.

While both women are strong-bodied and good strategists, their motivations and ambitions are violently opposed.

The colonists have discovered the serpent in the garden—Thread—and lose their Edenic illusions of Pern; Bitra becomes the second serpent. She brings to Pern her Earthly sense of greed and seduces men to get power and gemstones. She kills Kenjo and injures Ongola to steal a shuttle to get back to Earth's colonies and a life of luxury.

Telgar heroically stops Bitra from returning to Earth, but is unable to return to Pern, and becomes the second murder victim in Eden. In contrast to Bitra, however, she programs probes to study a potential Thread source, then dies as her husband finally declares his love for her. In spite of the high melodrama of her death, Telgar's story touches the Pernese colonists and readers. As the first hero and martyr of Pern, she exemplifies the kind of sacrifices and commitment that is needed to ensure the integrity of Pern.

The remaining characters, while being depicted in almost stereotypical ways (the Chinese as mysterious, the tinkers as unfriendly), illustrate a utopian ideal: diverse characters united for the benefit of all. McCaffrey realizes that Utopias are not created

without some conflict, and she uses a humane and creative punishment for one family: shunning by the rest of the colony. Dragonsdawn has a very large cast; many characters are sketches rather than full portraits, and readers do not get a clear shape of this young utopia.



## Social Concerns/Themes

Dragonsdawn shows McCaffrey's timely awareness of social issues. The colonists of Pern are doing what some of McCaffrey's readers would like to do: get away from Earth, forget the past, and start over. While the Earth and its colonies have grown to become the Federated Sentient Planets (FSP), Earth's principal problems are old and familiar: a pollution-plagued environment ruled by a technocratic bureaucracy. Since Pern is too far from Earth to be commercially exploited, the colonists establish an agriculturally-based economy, with a minimal, localized political structure.

Concern for the planet's ecology plays a large part in all decisions affecting the survival of the colony. The colonists bring many animals, plants and microorganisms from Earth, and biologists and genetic engineers help with integration and adaptation to Pern's ecology. Grazing animals are genetically altered to digest Pern's grasses. Metasynt dolphins, altered to communicate mentally with fishermen, are introduced. Scientists carry out genetic alterations on indigenous life forms to combat Thread. A geneticist creates the flaming dragons from the fire lizards, and a biologist shapes the grubs which eat ground-burrowing Thread.

The colonists acknowledge that they will be exchanging their technological lifestyle for a basic, if not feudal, existence. Most of them willingly make that trade—preserving the environment while maximizing their intelligence, integrity, and resourcefulness. This reliance on human resources also encourages greater racial and cultural integration, and colonists of all ethnic and minority groups are valued equally as they shape Pern's culture and environment.



# Techniques

Dragonsdawn is divided into three parts. "Landing" encompasses the establishment of Landing, the central staging area and focus of the expanding community as claims are staked and land explored. The second section, "Thread," begins eight years later with the first Threadfall experienced on the planet and the tragic consequences.

"Crossing," the final section, adds to these tragic events with the unexpected eruption of a volcano near Landing and the emergency evacuation of the settlement to the North Continent. These catastrophes emphasize the hardship, isolation, and commitment of the colonists. Scenes of hard work and disaster are punctuated by delightful glimpses of the growing dragons. Readers again feel the wonder of dragon-love and dragon-flight, while the colonists hope the dragons can preserve their planet.

Setting moves the novel's pace and plot; Pern has benign and maleficent aspects, and the colonists must make some quick and far-reaching decisions.

While Thread threatens the colony, the discovery of caves gives the settlers protection from Thread. The volcano also threatens Landing, but moving to the North Continent offers safety.

While the North is rockier, providing better Thread protection, the arable land is less fertile than the South, thus limiting agricultural production, and making crop protection from Thread imperative. The colonists decide to move to the North Continent, creating Fort Hold, the oldest Hold in the modern dragonrider's time.

# Adaptations

Dragonsdawn has also been adapted in a audio book of ten cassettes/fifteen hours. Published by Brilliance. Read by Dick Hill. Reviewed as having excellent characterization with good expression of emotion. Appealing.



## Key Questions

In a classic study of literature, one would take into account issues of character: whether a character is an antagonist or protagonist, what virtues and flaws do they exhibit, the depth or detail regarding their character; or one would take into account issues regarding the plot, particularly the character of conflicts (man v. man, man v. Nature) and the pace of the story; or issues of setting: place, time, landscape, etc. Typically, novelists fight the inclination to rehash their own formulas in subsequent novels, so that the character, plot and setting have minimal variation, particularly for science fiction/fantasy writers where series-writing is often discouraged. McCaffrey created Pern and her various dragonriders — and then sets them all aside.

In this novel, McCaffrey takes a risk as a novelist, with two departures from her usual approach to the Dragonriders of Pern series. First, she de-emphasizes the dragon/rider interaction and relies on her human characters to move the story. Second, she shifts the plot and setting from fighting Thread to establishing a colony. Consider what McCaffrey does to create a believable world, what other formulas she uses — then has to break. Does McCaffrey still tell a believable, compelling story? Are the characters, plot and setting effective or do they depend on previous knowledge of Pern for their significance? Or on a particular knowledge of Earth's problems?

1. This is the first Pern novel that does not focus on dragons or dragonriders. What are the cultural differences between these worlds? How are the social and cultural norms of 250 years later presaged in Dragonsdawn?

2. Science fiction makes much of the potential for humans to colonize other planets. How well does McCaffrey address the concerns you would anticipate if you were one of the colonists?

Considering the complications of alien life forms upsetting the native ecology, how has McCaffrey anticipated the transition? Does this seem realistic to you?

3. How do McCaffrey's characters give a sense of the struggles and triumphs of colonization?

4. Pern is designed to eventually become a low-tech, agrarian society.

How have the high-tech colonists preparing for this eventuality?

5. How does this novel compare with other narratives regarding colonization such as accounts of colonial America and Westerns?

6. What symbolic role does Thread play in Dragonsdawn?

7. How does McCaffrey use the pairings of Admiral Paul Benden and Governor Emily Boll in the novel?





Sorka Hanrahan and Sean Connell?

Sallah Telgar and Avril Bitra? Ted Tubberman and Paul Benden? Sallah Telgar and Tarvi Andiyar?

## Literary Precedents

Dragonsdawn's most striking literary antecedent is Johann Rudolph Wyss's *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812). Like the famous family, the colonists are equipped to establish themselves in their new home, and they are quite ingenious in adapting to their new environment. Like another famous castaway, *Robinson Crusoe*, they are fiercely self-sufficient and renounce their dependence on Earth when Thread devastates their homes and families.

The theme of the survival of a colony is reminiscent of tales of the American pilgrims and Puritans and pioneer tales of the westward expansion, particularly narratives told mostly by women—a newly-rediscovered genre of American literature. McCaffrey does not depict the colony as a western-style boomtown, with bars and brothels as the first establishments, but as a homesteading community, where the first priorities are farms and schools. She even follows the old homesteading guideline: You own as much land as you can work, but no more.

## Related Titles

Science fiction and fantasy writers frequently expand their short stories and other short works into novels.

From the beginning of the Dragonriders of Pern series, McCaffrey has included an introduction, which has been revised since its inception, giving the origins of the Pernese and their ongoing struggles against Thread. Avid fans who have been watching the changes in these essays now have a full novel on the founding of Pern. Dragonsdawn signals a new Pern series, answering questions and developing interesting new characters. Because Dragonsdawn is a prequel to the other Pern novels, McCaffrey creates a new cast of characters. However, these new characters are not totally unfamiliar; they have left their namesakes in Pern's weyrs and holds. Ironically, these heroes and antiheroes have been forgotten by their descendants, who, in *The Renegades of Pern* and later novels, will seek their lost history.

The new series regarding the Ancients is elaborated in *The Chronicles of Pern: First Fall* (1993), a collection of short stories that fills in the blanks of early Pern history and shows the impact of Threadfall on a new society.

"The Survey: P.E.R.N." covers the FSP's cursory exploration and classification of a planet in the Rukbat system (Parallel Earth, Resources Negligible) as suitable for colonization; "The Dolphin's Bell," a novella, establishes the dolphins of Pern as significant colonists and heroes in the transfer of materials to the North Continent after seismic activity buried Landing; "The Ford of Red Hanrahan" details the establishment of Ruatha hold and hints its significance in Pern's future; "The Second Weyr" discusses the need of, and planning for, the larger Weyrs in Pern to eliminate overcrowding and maximize efficient coverage for Thread Fall; "Rescue Run" explains why no other ships have ever visited Pern and probably never will.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994