

IGEN HOLDLESS CAVERNS

The Igen Holdless Caverns are a complex and complicated place not only geographically (they are situated along side a gorge honeycombed with caverns that run for miles back from the entrances along the gorge and often lead to exits hidden in the nearby hills), but also because there is no truly centralized government or ruling body. It can be a dark and frightening place to those who don't know their way around or the traditions and practices that have sprung up over the millennia to help keep the place running.

DISTINCTIVE PLACES INSIDE THE HOLDLESS CAVERNS

- There is a long, broad cavern that is considered common ground called the Main Cavern Hall where anyone industrious enough can set up their own little business, selling whatever they can make or trade for. Often these ventures are no more than a table or heavy rug laid out with wares, but some have made use of nearby woodlands to build themselves structures with more permanence. Still others with the available marks to pay to have it done have taken over some of the deep alcoves or caverns branching off from the Main Cavern Hall and built themselves truly impressive businesses.
- Deep into the Main Cavern Hall there is a section known as the Red-light District, which got its name from the red tinted glass glow lanterns hung throughout the cavern. Here you will find all the brothels, gamehalls, alehalls, a lot (though not all), of the entertainment halls just to name a few. A few fairly infamous brothels and alehalls are to be found here with reputations that far exceed the bounds of the Holdless Caverns, and it has been known for some of the more polite society of Pern to come here for their more base entertainments. A private entrance makes this practice easier for them, leading to the Red-light District from just off the road between Igen and Lemos Holds.
- Down along the bottom of the gorge is a series of caverns that as far as anyone has ascertained do not seem to connect with the main body of caverns further up the gorge where the bulk of the Holdless live and die. These caverns are used by the Holdless Trading Bands, bands of traders that tend to specialize in specific wares and who are proud to consider themselves Holdless. Most often these bands are small and tend to be family oriented, though some can get to be as big as several hundred people.
- A series of caverns known as 'The Squatters' Caverns,' have been set aside for those who for some reason choose not to be permanent residents, instead only using the Igen Holdless Caverns as a stop over where they can get supplies, or as a place of protection from Thread. It is rare for the permanent residents to ever set foot inside these caverns because the Squatters tend to have no pride for

themselves and therefore no pride of place. Often the Squatters' Caverns are squalid and riddled with disease and pests. Raiders tend to use the Squatters' Caverns as a haven through which they can procure goods and because of this The Guard are to be seen here in force.

DISTINCTIVE GROUPS IN THE HOLDLESS CAVERNS

Because humans in general, and the Pernese as a rule tend to feel safer within groups, there are inside the Holdless Caverns some very distinct groups that have sprung up over time.

- Some specialize in some sort of nefarious trade or another, such as assassins, extremely talented thieves, smugglers, and mercenaries, that will practice for hire and are called collectively 'Knots'. These groups are very small, very exclusive about who is or isn't an actual member, are generally based out of their own series of caverns in which they are the law, and have their own distinctive badges that they wear. Often their leaders are charismatic and people who are not members of the group will gravitate into their sphere of influence and will give their loyalty to the group in exchange for protection and a stable environment in which to live.
- In other parts of the Holdless Caverns there are often groups that are in par with Terran city councils that are responsible for administering laws and seeing to the well-being of the people living within their influence, but often these groups don't have the same power as the Knots. There are a few examples of extremely charismatic individuals that have managed to acquire quite a little power base this way over the course of the history of the Igen Holdless Caverns, though these are few and far between. These groups have no common designation.
- The Holdless Trading Bands are often familial groups of traditional traders that consider the Holdless Caverns to be their home base and some of whom will travel the length and breadth of Pern. They tend to specialize in specific services or wares and will often bring both Marks and harder to find wares back to the Holdless Caverns from around Pern. Some have members that remain Turn round in their caverns along the base of the gorge, often to see after the herds that some maintain.

The Trading Bands have a kind of indistinct place in Pernese society, a very structured and rigid thing. Holds and Weyrs consider them to be Holdless though because they serve useful functions to them, the more polite society of Pern is more than happy to deal with them in ways that they are unwilling to deal with the rest of the Holdless. But because of their 'Holdless' status in this sector of Pernese society, they exist outside of and separate to the cultures of the

Holds and Weyrs. On the other hand, even though they consider themselves as ‘Holdless’ and reserve a certain loyalty to the Igen Holdless Caverns, the Holdless at Igen do not consider them to be part of their cultural identity which serves the Trading Bands just fine. So in essence they have found a niche in both societies, but have a completely separate cultural identity from both.

Regardless of if they consider themselves Holdless or not, the Trading Bands have their own cultural identity that often can be traced back to the original nonconformist groups that were brought to Pern along with the settlers. As a rule they have an oral tradition that has managed – through story and song – to preserve knowledge that the rest of Pern has forgotten, even if it has over the course of time morphed into something more fantastic than the original. They have their own social conventions and traditions which in some ways are more liberal than the rest of Pern, in some ways are far stricter and that at first glance can seem to conflict but which have always served them well. Because they are proud of their ‘outsider’ status, they tend to wear clothes that make them stand out, go to lengths to experiment with ‘tried and true,’ will often have commonplace items of unusual configuration, and decorate their yardos (the hard topped covered wagons they use as living quarters while on the road) as ornately as they can. Unlike traditional Pernese society, the Trading Bands have for centuries appreciated wood for its lightness and versatility compared to stone, and it also must be said, for its sheer beauty.

- **Even among the Holdless there are classes and those that chose not to live in the Igen Holdless Caverns, instead wandering aimlessly with no profession or hope of a Hold or Weyr taking them in are the lowest. They are referred to by the permanent and semi-permanent residents as ‘Squatters.’ These people tend to come and go singly or in very small groups, never staying long and are mostly people who can’t cope with either the fact they are now Holdless or can’t cope with the reality of the Igen Holdless Caverns enough to become permanent residents.**

RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The Holdless in Igen go out of their way, along with the Holdless Trading Bands, to curry favor with the local Minor, Major and Cot Holds. They have no wish for these people to petition Igen Hold to have them removed. They also tend to keep as low a profile as they can since the Lord Holder of Igen sends guards to patrol the Main Cavern Hall to keep an eye on things. Officially this battalion has no designation, but among themselves as well as among the Holdless they are known simple as ‘The Guards.’ Some of these guards can be bought, others cannot, especially since they tend to be rotated in and out of this particular duty, so it is in everyone's interest that all business of a nefarious nature go on under the thin veneer of civilization they have managed to foster. So long as the Holdless mind their manners, do not irritate neighboring Lemos Hold or Igen Weyr, do not rape and pillage the Igen

holdings, Lord Byus and Lady Tangelles are more than happy to leave them in peace as all Igen Lord Holders have done traditionally.

The Holdless as a rule have no love of the society that shunned them and turned them out. Most of the shunned were criminals in some fashion ~before~ they were caught and barred from Hold and Weyr and most see no reason to abandon that which served them before and those born and raised in the caverns have simply grown up in its often rough and rude environment. It is however a fact that it is often hard to bullshit a bullshitter, so pulling one over on a fellow member of the Holdless is often difficult at best. The Knots tend to hire their services to the highest bidder no matter who that might turn out to be, and because they have a kind of code of ethics, regardless of what they think or feel they will endeavor to their greatest capacity to complete a job no matter the cost.

As a tweak to the nose of Pernese society, centuries ago the Holdless designed a heraldic crest to represent themselves, more as a joke than anything else. The joke stuck though because groups yearn for an identity in much the same way individuals do and symbols are very much a part of that. For the same reason, the Knots all take pleasure in wearing badges to indicate which Knot they are a member of. Relying on simple pictures or color, the Holdless have devised emblems that readily identify themselves to one another and these may be in the form of a tattoo, pendant about the neck, badge or any number of different ways. Sometimes these have the added benefit of identifying themselves as someone of a higher authority to the average Holdless citizen and they have been known to break up trouble before The Guard even caught wind of something untoward happening.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Though proper Pernese society looks at the Igen Holdless Caverns with disdain, and often harps on Lord Byrus and his ancestors for allowing it to continue, the truth of the matter is that it represents the adaptability and resilience of human nature. The descendants of those cast out of Hold, Hall and Weyr have created a culture in which they can survive and even flourish. And through their efforts, the Holdless Trading Bands have found a place that they can use as a home base, a meeting place where their culture has also thrived separate and distinct from the one in the caverns above them. Even major Trading Trains, and some of the minor ones from designated Holds have come to recognize the Holdless Caverns as a legitimate stopover in their never ending circuit around the length and breadth of the Northern Continent.

Between the efforts of the Trading Bands, both large and small, bringing in goods and then taking them back out for trade in Weyrs, Holds and Halls, and the efforts of those within the Caverns and Trading Bands with marketable skills, they have without most Pernese society realizing it, become a major influence on the overall economy of Eastern Pern. Many local Minor and Cot Holders count themselves lucky to be so close to them, though because of traditional prejudice would never

admit to it. Lemos, being the closest Major Hold to them, finds their presence distasteful and often lobbies for their numbers being culled or for their complete removal, but even they do not turn the Trading Bands away.

The simple fact is that everyone among the permanent residents of the Caverns knows that there is no place else out there for them, so everyone tends to behave to at least the standards set by tradition within the Caverns. The very distinct groups within the Caverns have found ways to coexist in relative harmony, and though as a whole the place is rude and rough by polite standards, there is very little crime among them of any real merit. Life however can be cheap, and sometimes the punishments meted out are harsh for any crimes that do occur. Though the Holdless view each other as a brotherhood of sorts, the rest of Pern is not so included and is thereby considered fair game.