

HOLDLESS TRADING BANDS

The Holdless Trading Bands are a unique culture among the social groups of Pern. A fiercely independent people, they value above everything their freedom, their families, and their Bands and will fight ferociously against anything that threatens any of them. They regard the Holded with a certain disdain because they feel that these groups have given up something important by being bonded to the land and nothing short of Threadfall will force them to spend extended periods living under stone. A proud people, they will only rarely ask for help from anyone outside their social grouping. They cheerfully welcome strangers traveling with them and will be unfailingly polite, but no matter how long you travel with them, or how well they get to know you, the Holdless Trading Bands always consider you an outsider. Gaining the friendship and respect of even one member of the community takes a lot of work but once you have it you have a potent compatriot for life.

There are three types of Trading Bands, and they are quite distinct though they are governed the same way. There are the major Bands which are quite large and travel the length and breadth of Pern the same as Holded and Holdless Trading Trains, usually taking two seasons to return to what they consider their home base in the Igen Holdless Caverns. Then there are the minor Bands, which have territories that they trade within that rarely if ever overlap and that will generally return to Igen for the winter months. Then there are the Bands that are extremely small and that like to be referred to as 'Wandering' Bands. These are often made up of extended families or clans and these types of Bands can be found anywhere on Pern. Often they will trade services for their keep during Threadfall, but other than that, they are insular and will trade only for those things they need.

All Bands are governed the same basic way. All have a leader called the Headman or Headwoman as the Holdless believe all members are equally capable of the wisdom required to govern. Though the methods employed to choose these leaders vary from group to group, he is always much respected and has the final word in all things that concern the Band. The elderly are always valued for their experience and are often consulted. The larger Bands have a 'Council of Elders' to assist the Headman in governing the larger numbers of people that make them up. The Bands have a complex legal system to help maintain order, and I have devoted an entire section to it later. Unlike the Holded or Holdless in Igen, the Bands do not expect anyone not of the Bands to live by their laws. It is, however in their best interest for anyone traveling with them or dealing with them on a regular basis to be aware of them and do their best not to run afoul of them. As potent a potential friend as they are, they are also equally potent an enemy and many a Cotholder or Minor Holder have found themselves wondering why these Bands, from the largest to the smallest refuse to visit them. This would be because an injustice visited on one is considered an injustice to them all.

As a social group, the Holdless Bands are quite flamboyant and it shows from their style and color of clothing all the way down to their ornately carved or painted

vardos and the Runnerbeasts they have bred to pull them. Novelty is a passion for them, and they will regularly flout the tried and true methods employed by the Crafts for no better reason than the end result might not so much work better as be unique. Because of this they have among them musical instruments of curious configuration and sound, they have common everyday utensils that are ornate or of unusual design or material, and the cut of their clothes are often completely distinctive. More examples abound, but one thing that holds true is that often these items are not only unusual, they are often one of a kind, not reproduced anywhere else. This speaks volumes about the individualistic nature of not only the Bands as a whole, but also of the individuals which comprise them.

I have spent a number of Turns living with the Holdless Trading Band community as a Harper. Since travel in numbers is always safer than travel alone, I have often found myself in their encampments and I have tried here to explain some of their social traditions and rituals as well as their complex legal system. These are by no means graven in stone, and often will vary slightly from group to group but in my experience, these are the traditional rites of passage and their methods of employ.

Senior Journeyman Harper Mahdrigal

BIRTH

Traditionally a birth can't take place in the family's usual home, whether it be a tent, vardo or cavern. Birth is considered a private thing, to be kept between the women of the camp and because of this and the fact birth is often a messy affair, the women will remove the mother to a separate tent or cavern, or in a pinch a wagon. Any knots in the mother's clothing will be untied or cut, partially to make the mother more comfortable, but also in the superstitious belief this ensures the umbilical cord will not become knotted. Even the mother's hair will be loosened if it has been pinned or tied with a ribbon.

After the birth the father is brought to the birthing location and he will from this point on be responsible for the welfare of the mother and child because once the women leave it is forbidden for anyone else to approach before the Introduction to the Band. Before the women go however, the father must ritually recognize the child as his own by wrapping the babe in swaddling on which a few drops of paternal blood are placed. The Introduction to the Band takes place a few sevendays after the birth, most commonly between two and three, and for this time the Band will stay in one place unless something drastic happens. During this interim period, both mother and child are isolated from the community though the father can come and go.

The Introduction begins formally and will end significantly less so. The women will spend all day preparing a feast in celebration of the birth and the men are responsible for gathering the gifts to be given to the family. Most often these gifts will consist of Marks for the luck and long life of the baby, but cradles and

swaddling or clothes are also imparted. Once all preparations are made, the Headman and/or Headwoman are introduced to the child outside the birthing location. From there, the Headman and/or Headwoman will take the babe and make a formal introduction to the entire Band. After the formal introduction the parents will announce the child's guardians – those people who have agreed to be responsible for the child should anything ever happen to one or both parents.

After all formal obligations are met, the party begins. Often the women spend time admiring the babe, and men will go off to drink toasts to the father. These celebrations can go on all night.

Holdless Trading Band parents might be called permissive raising their children, according to non-Band standards. That is not to say that the Turns of growing up are easy ones. The rigors and difficulties of the Holdless Trading Bands' existence serve to toughen their children. The growing child plays at will, improvising entertainments when necessary. The child has a special place in the family, adored and cherished by his or her parents and it is the responsibility of everyone in the family unit to help raise the child. He or she learns whatever skills can be acquired from the mother and/or father, first by imitating them and finally by helping the parents whenever and where ever possible. He or she also learns the ways of the Bands by observation and at certain points participation as well.

COURTING/BETROTHAL/MARRIAGE

Engagements and marriages are great and joyous events for the Bands, signifying the extension and continuation of the family. For this reason, they are times of great celebration. Marriage signifies a change in social status of the married couple in the Holdless Trading Band society, and they will now be considered as full and productive members of the community. All members of the Bands are expected to marry and the customs and rituals for engagements and marriages described here are traditional.

COURTING

The Holdless Bands are extremely social among one another, and anytime there is more than one Band camped near together, as they are at the Igen Caverns, you will find Bands mingling freely together, most often at the camp fires set aside for the entire Band. One-on-one contact between the different sexes is generally discouraged though groups of boys and girls are always encouraged to mingle whenever the Bands come together. Frequently the presence of a girl's brothers in such a group actively insures that she will be treated with due respect by any admirer and adults are always handy to keep an eye on things. It is in this manner that all courting is to be done.

'Looping' refers to a practice of the unspoken for ladies of the community dancing around in a "loop," or circuit. This can take place at any time more than one Band is present, especially weddings but can be done even at the pomana after a funeral, and the men of the communities serve as a gallant and appreciative audience. In this way the women can show off, hopefully attracting the attentions of a suitable mate, and it serves to impress upon the men just who is and who isn't available.

BETROTHAL/MARRIAGE PRICE

A young couple's inclinations play a dominant role in the preliminary stages of their families 'arranging' marriages. Parents are consulted and their opinions are heavily weighed because it is their responsibility to see to it that their children make a good match and that the couple is set up in their new life properly, but ultimately the final decision is made by the young people. The family however plays the active part in marriage formalities.

Holdless Trading Bands maintain the institution of marriage price. This is a payment made by the family of the bride to the family of the groom and is largely symbolic. Normally this 'darro,' or dowry is used by the family of the groom to set up the young couple with most everything they will need to start a new life together. The groom's family will supply the Vardo, the Runners to pull it, as well as everything else using the 'darro.' These negotiations can be extremely serious, and the bride's family is responsible for offering everything they can afford because these Marks or goods will see to it that their daughter is well established. It is also important for the groom's family as well, and for the same reasons. It is considered a disgrace to not be able to adequately finance the couple's start in life, and if the groom's family feels the match is a good one they will make up deficiencies in the marriage price that the bride's family is capable of offering. Often these negotiations can be finalized in one evening, though it has been known to drag on for days.

When an agreement is reached and the marriage price is accepted, there is often a formal announcement in public with a small banquet, complete with music and singing and dancing. The symbol of this joyous celebration is a bottle of wine or brandy wrapped in a brightly colored handkerchief, brought to the ceremony by either the groom's father or the groom. A necklace of gold coins is attached to the bottle, which the groom will take and put around the future bride's neck. The necklace makes it clear to all that the girl is now engaged and not available as a bride to any other man, and she will be expected to wear it at all times until the wedding. The bottle is then passed around to the guests until it is emptied at which time it is refilled with wine or brandy for use at the wedding celebration.

At this time, the groom must prove his worth to the bride's family. After the formal engagement party, the groom goes to work for his fiancé's father for one Turn for nothing more than room and board. The idea is for the groom to show that he is capable of supporting and protecting the bride and any children they may have, but

this extended engagement also serves to help the groom to integrate into the bride's family and Band. The engaged couple will spend little or no time together alone. Often siblings are called upon to act as chaperones during this period though the young man is typically in the company of the prospective father-in-law and any brothers.

Should an arranged engagement grow to be onerous for either party, it is simply called off. To the Bands there are no social implications to this because as a cultural group Bands feel that both parties need to be sure this is the match for them before the wedding.

MARRIAGE RITUALS

The wedding itself is largely a symbolic act. The mere fact that two people have agreed to live together and share their lives constitutes marriage. There is however, a traditional but simple wedding ceremony performed so that all can see and recognize the attachment. Bride and groom hold hands or have their wrists tied with a leather thong while the head of the family breaks bread, sprinkles it with salt and gives a portion to each. These portions are then exchanged and eaten. A huge feast is served on these happy occasions. Open fire pits are made over which whole pigs, sides of bovine, game, or chicken are roasted. There may also be huge platters of fried whiteroots and boiled greens stuffed with river grains, chopped meat, fruits and herbs. Drink is also served generously. Musicians play traditional rhythmic tunes and there is dancing and songs. These feasts may last two or three days.

Wedding gifts are usually of Marks, because this will help the new couple start their new lives together and because the families, with the marriage price, should have set the couple up with most everything they could need. Most times the Marks are converted to jewelry or other valuables and are put away for when the couple has their first child, to help pay for anything the coming of a baby might require. Often new wives will wear with pride the jewelry they have earmarked for their first child.

Sometimes when an accord on the marriage price cannot be reached, there will be a 'rapt,' or ritual kidnapping. When the groom returns his bride to her Band, they will have mock chastisement heaped on them. One or both families usually are aware that this is going to happen; elopement being the only way that both families can save face in the community for not coming to accord. Usually when there is a 'rapt' the couple will be forced to live with family until they can provide their own Vardo and Runners, though everyone will help with this.

MARRIAGE

The celebrations ended, a new life begins for the couple. They now take their places as full members of the community. The bride and groom will traditionally travel and live with her family, not his, though there are exceptions. Marriages among

Bands are serious commitments, and there are strict obligations on both sides. Females are expected to be virgins when they marry and to remain faithful until death. Although the male is expected to remain faithful, he is under no such virginity restrictions. Both parties are expected to produce children to continue the Band, as well as both being responsible for the caring, raising, and training of these children. Both are expected to bring status and respect to their family and do nothing that would diminish their immediate or extended family's honor, nor as fully recognized adult members of their community, to disgrace their Band or the Holdless Trading Communities as a whole. They are expected to remain married; although divorce does exist, the reasons for such an action must be extreme and must be provable as the party instituting the divorce proceedings can expect the family of the other party to call for a Kris.

The Bands recognize marriage as the only way to ensure family, and until the birth of offspring, there is no family. Family is of the utmost importance to the Bands because it is the only way to ensure the continuation of their way of life, and as such marriage is deemed important, and it will elevate the bride and groom into adulthood in the eyes of the Band. But marriage alone does not ensure your place in society the way children will.

DEATH

For Bands, death is a senseless, unnatural occurrence and at the approach of death their only concerns are with the pain and heartbreak of the final separation from a loved one, and for his or her comfort. When a Band feels that one of their group is about to die, word is urgently sent to all relatives, no matter how far away they might be. Through fixed travel plans that rarely change, Bands are able to find one another in times of need, even without fixed addresses and when an emergency arises, relatives and friends are contacted, especially in the case of death. All relatives who can possibly do so appear at the bedside of the person who is reaching the end of his or her life to show family solidarity. He or she must also die in his or her habitual place, where they are most comfortable because Bands believe that those dying should do so with freedom from petty concerns. The dying person is never left alone out of compassion for his condition; relatives and friends gather around the dying day and night and if possible others in the camp take care of practical matters. Tears and lamentations are only rarely publicly or dramatically displayed; the Bands believe grief is a private thing.

From the time of death until the burial, certain traditional customs are strictly observed. There is no shaving or combing of the hair and no food is prepared out of respect for the departed. Only the drinking of coffee, brandy, or other liquors is permitted. He or she is washed and dressed in their finest clothes immediately after death. An important step is the gathering together of those things that the deceased enjoyed most during life to be placed in the bed with the deceased. These can include almost anything, such as favorite clothing, tools, eating utensils, jewelry, musical instruments and Marks.

The color worn by mourners at Band funerals is traditionally been either white or red. White has been thought of as a symbol of purity, of protection, and of good luck. In some Bands, the women will dress entirely in white, and the men will wear white vests and gloves and place white bands around their hats. Red, too, has symbolized protection, good luck and life (probably because of the ancient belief that blood is the source of vitality not only of the individual, but also of the Band and of the family), and is often worn at funerals. Red blouses and skirts are common apparel for women, and men often wear red kerchiefs around their necks. Red is also a dominant color in many funeral decorations.

A small band will sometimes play before the ritual burning of the deceased's Vardo. A procession will begin several dragonlengths outside the camp, with the deceased's children first, the widow next, then the Headman and/or woman and then the remaining relatives behind them. As this procession approaches the vardo, the Headman and/or woman pours wine or brandy on the vardo steps and on each wheel to ensure it will burn. The oldest surviving child or a grandchild puts the vardo to flame with a torch they have carried with them in the procession. The mourners generally throw Marks, flowers, as well as handfuls of earth into the vardo as it burns as a display of respect to the dead.

Since the burning of the Vardo obviously impose great financial hardship on the surviving family, another band tradition is for all their family, as well as their Band, to contribute to its replacement.

The death signals the beginning of a formal period of mourning for all close relatives. Widows, daughters and mothers are expected to cover their hair with a white kerchief, husbands, sons and fathers are expected to wear red armbands for one full Turn. Another tradition immediately following the funeral is a dinner called a pomana. It is an enormous meal, usually the first one eaten by the mourners since the death of their friend or relative and it is both somber and boisterous. The idea is to mourn the death as well as celebrate the life and there will be lots of food and drink, and often stories will be told of the deceased's life. There is inevitably a large crowd at a pomana because it is an occasion for friends and family to unite to wish the departed a goodbye. These pomana are held twice, traditionally two days and one Turn after the death. The second pomana is signal that the formal period of mourning is now over and the close relatives are then expected to get on with their lives.

LEGAL SYSTEM AND EXAMPLES OF PUNISHMENTS

KRIS, OR COURT

In all cases, it is the aggrieved party who must request Kris, which is held at a neutral location, usually the encampment of another, impartial Band. If none is available, then depending on the severity of the infraction, arrangements will be

made for either the Kris to be held at a later time, or another Band will be contacted and asked to meet up with the Band which requires the Kris. The defendants and plaintiffs must represent themselves as advocates are forbidden unless the alleged victim is old, sick or very young and in these cases the victim's nearest male relative brings the case to the Kris. If the welfare of the community demands joint action, the entire Band may be considered a plaintiff and the Headman/woman will present their case.

All Band members are allowed audience and entire families are expected to be present for support. Only in the most delicate matters, such as adultery, will the public be excluded. Witnesses may speak freely about the case, for Bands believe there can be no justice without hearing the matter out to its fullest. When members of the audience feel the witness is not being truthful or responsive, they will often hiss their disapproval.

When the accused testify on their own behalf they are expected to be truthful and the Kris insures their honesty by invoking a blood oath, which it can also invoke on witnesses should it be deemed necessary. The judge may ask for expert opinions from other Headmen/women or from any Elders, but only the judge decides the guilt or innocence, and the eventual punishments.

After hearing all the facts and opinions, the judge declares the verdict in public to those present. Any verdicts by official state trials by Harper, Holder, CraftMaster or Weyr Leaderships are not considered and have no effect on the Kris. If the accused is found innocent, there will be a celebration involving an official banquet held by the impartial Band supplying the neutral ground and judge for the Kris. If the defendant is found guilty, any number of different penalties might be invoked. These can range from the largely symbolic one of having to pay all court expenses, including food and drink for the judge and expert witnesses, to the most serious of all, permanent banishment from the Holdless Trading Band community.

PUNISHMENTS

The Kris imposes punishment according to the seriousness of the offense. The death penalty is completely unknown, and the Kris relies primarily on such sanctions as fines, corporal punishment and banishment. The responsibility to pay a Kris-imposed fine, called a glaba, falls collectively on the wrongdoers lineage. Corporal punishment is typically only used in cases of infidelity and can include such things as shaving the hair of an adulterous wife, or requiring adulterous husbands to submit to a public lashing.

Perhaps the most severe punishment is Marime, or banishment. This is achieved by declaring the offender Marime, a term that means socially rejected in its legal sense, and is considered a sentence of social death. For the length of time prescribed for Marime, the offender is forbidden social contact with other members of the Holdless Band community and is only referred to as a Darkling. No marriages are arranged

and any pending will be canceled and should they die during their banishment, no one will publicly mourn them nor will they have a funeral. The individual or individuals declared Marime are not welcomed in encampments and must live on the outskirts. Most times the offender's immediate family will also be declared Marime as well because ordinarily the knowledge that this is a distinct possibility is a great deterrent to crime. Marime sentences can last for a few days or Turns and also involves permanent loss of status and respect when the guilty party has been reinstated. A Marime label can be removed only by the forgiveness of the offended party, the passage of the prescribed time, the meeting of the terms set forth by the Kris to remove Marime or by another Kris.

There are strong taboos against exploiting or stealing from a fellow member of the Holdless Trading Band community, as well as against all crimes of violence to anyone (unless sufficient provocation can be proven), 'unwise' or criminal commercial association with giorgio (which brings shame on all the Bands), and for failure to pay a debt to a fellow member of the Holdless Band community.

Socially disruptive behavior may result in legal sanctions, sometimes including a sentence of Marime. Permanent Marime is only used for the most serious of crimes, such as murder. Temporary Marime sentences may be imposed for less serious crimes. The Kris may also impose a form of 'community service' and require the offender to work for a defined period of time without pay to compensate the victim or the Band.

The entire community is responsible for enforcing sanctions. Peer pressure fueled by communal knowledge of a verdict ensures compliance. Only in rare cases, when the Bands have difficulty enforcing a judgment by the Kris, will they then turn to the giorgio penal system. At this point, the accused will usually accept the Kris's punishment rather than face giorgio law and punishment. Vindication by a non-Holdless Trading Band court does not however erase a previous conviction by a Kris in the minds of the Bands.

EXAMPLES OF PUNISHMENTS BY KRIS

- When the victim is of the Bands, thieves are publicly shamed and banished until he has repaid the victim, at which time his Marime is forgiven (there is no social prohibition against stealing from giorgio, though it is not encouraged because this can have profound implications for the Band).
- Failure to repay a debt to a member of the Holdless Trading Band community is considered extremely serious. The Trading Bands rely on each other as sources of material and social interaction. The debtor is publicly shamed and banished until he/she has repaid the debt.
- Murderers are dealt with swiftly and with extreme prejudice, no matter who the victim is. In these cases the Band is considered the plaintiff and the

Headman/woman is responsible for requesting the Kris. The offender as well as his immediate family will be confined to their vardo until a Kris can be arranged. If the offender is found guilty, they are banished, sometimes along with their immediate family forever with no hope of finding shelter with any Holdless Trading Band ever again.

Note: Although the Bands have no capital punishment, they will turn a blind eye when a member takes the life of someone banished for murder because officially, that person is already dead to them. Often the entire Council of Elders of a Band will be aware that this is going to happen because they will be called on to decide who it is that has 'claim' or best cause to see such vengeance done. This is not to be confused with a Kris, which is impartial. The perpetrator will have already been tried before a Kris, found guilty and banished. This is an unofficial and certainly not impartial act by the Band and the offended parties to see 'justice' done.

In extremely rare instances, this vengeance is also taken against non-members of the community when one of the Holded or Holdless community is responsible for the death of a Band member. One reason it is rare is that such an act can bring down the wrath of the Holded or Holdless communities on the Bands.

- **Crimes of violence** between members of the community are frowned on, crimes of violence against giorgio are considered an endangerment to the Band and as such are dealt with as swiftly as possible. In these cases the Band is considered the plaintiff and the Headman/woman is responsible for requesting the Kris. Often if the victim is a member of the community the perpetrator is banished and will only be reinstated once a prescribed amount of 'community service' is performed by all parties involved. If the victim is giorgio, the Headman/woman will often be called upon to soothe the ruffled feathers of a Holder, and more often than not before this is done it will find them and the Band in debt to the Holder. The offender will often find himself banished until he can repay the Headman/woman as well as the Band.

If it can be shown that sufficient cause for the violence was present, then the crime may be forgiven and no Kris called. The provocation would have to be extreme, because Bands have an acute aversion to violence unless there is no other alternative. If just cause is felt when a giorgio is involved, the Band will rally around the offender and have been known to either pack up and disappear in the night, or confuse the issue until no one can determine what truly happened. More than one Harper has found himself in this unenviable position.

- A slightly more murky crime is **'unwise' commercial association with giorgio.** This can be very nearly anything, but the end result is very nearly always something that will reflect badly on the Band as a whole. Bands pride themselves on at least looking honest and up front with their customers whether Holded or Holdless, and if anything is done to tarnish that, there will be consequences.

Those consequences can vary depending on the offense, but usually it is a fine and community service by both the offender and his immediate family. If the burden is heavy enough, the offender can find himself banished, usually pending the payment of a large fine and a formal public apology, but in some cases the offense was such that they find themselves banished forever.

- Because family is so important to the Bands, crimes against family members are particularly distasteful. Molestation of a child will find the perpetrator publicly flogged and then permanently banished. Beating of a spouse or child will find the perpetrator banished, usually for a prescribed time, as well as a fine to be paid to the injured party at reinstatement. Often the perpetrator will find him/herself divorced and without vardo or runners, and can expect to have the ire of every woman loudly and publicly heaped on him/her constantly for the rest of his/her life, and men will rarely associate with them unless they have no choice. Often members will leave rather than face the consequences.
- Rape is another offense that is distasteful for Bands, and often the perpetrators will be publicly flogged as well as banished, sometimes along with his immediate family. If the victim is an unmarried girl, she is assumed to have been a virgin and a large fine will be assessed for both her and her family to compensate them for her diminished status for marriage. Though the banishment is rarely permanent, the length of time varies considerably, as does the size of the fines imposed. Often perpetrators will find themselves the victim of the loud and public ire of every woman in the camp at every opportunity, and men will rarely associate with them unless they have no choice.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- ◆ Blood Oaths – A ritual oath sworn using the left hand after a shallow cut has been made in the palm. The idea is that the swearing party is swearing by not only his own blood and thereby honor, but also by the blood and honor of his entire lineage from time immemorial.
- ◆ Darkling – A term used to refer to someone who is Marime so as to avoid using their name.
- ◆ Darro – The ceremonial dowry or marriage price paid by the bride's family to the groom's.
- ◆ Giorgio – A term for anyone not of the Holdless Trading Bands.
- ◆ Glabá – The fines imposed by the Kris, which are the responsibility of everyone in the wrongdoer's lineage.

- ◆ **Introduction to the Band** – A formal ritual where a baby is ‘introduced’ to the rest of the band, and its name is officially given. Also, the child’s guardians are announced during this ritual.
- ◆ **Kris** – A term used to refer to the court held by the Bands to hear grievances and decide guilt.
- ◆ **Looping** - Refers to a practice of the ladies of the community dancing around in a "loop," or circuit.
- ◆ **Marime** – A term that means unclean. If used in its legal sense, it refers to the social banishment used as a punishment by the Kris.
- ◆ **Pomana** – What we would refer to as the wake; it is often has more of a festive feel to it as the Holdless believe that the deceased’s life should be celebrated as well as his or her passing mourned.
- ◆ **Rapt** - Ritual kidnapping in which the groom will take the bride from her parent’s encampment, abstemiously without them knowing in order to avoid the marriage price or for whatever reason, and elope.
- ◆ **Recognition Ritual** – A ritual in which the father will prick his finger with a knife and after placing his paternal blood on the swaddling, wraps the child, thereby acknowledging the baby as his own blood.