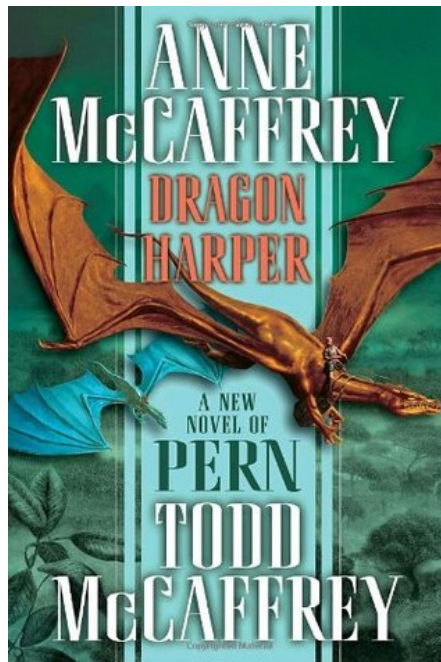




Dragon Harper

Anne McCaffrey , Todd McCaffrey

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For millions of readers the world over, the name Pern is magical, conjuring up grand vistas of a distant planet whose blue skies are patrolled by brave dragons and their noble riders, a paradise threatened by the periodic fall of deadly Thread. But not all dangers descend from the skies. Now, in their third collaboration, Anne McCaffrey and her son, Todd McCaffrey, spin a tale of a mysterious illness that may succeed in doing what centuries of Threadfall could not: kill every last human on Pern.

Life in the Harper Hall is busy for best friends Kindan, Nonala, and Kelsa. As the only female apprentices, Nonala and Kelsa are the butt of jokes and easy targets for the bully Vaxoram and his cronies. But when Kindan springs to Kelsa's defense, he winds up in a fight for his life against the older, bigger Vaxoram—a fight that will lead to a surprising friendship.

Meanwhile, in nearby Fort Hold, a clutch of fire-lizard eggs is about to hatch, and Lord Bemin's beautiful young daughter, Koriana, is determined to Impress one of the delightful creatures. At the hatching, Kindan Impresses a fire-lizard of his own . . . and wins the heart of Koriana. But Lord Bemin mistrusts harpers and will not hear of a match between his daughter and the low-born Kindan.

Then fate intervenes in the form of a virulent plague as fast-spreading as it is deadly. Arising suddenly, as if out of nowhere, the contagion decimates hold after hold, paying no heed to distinctions of birth. In this feverish crucible, friendship and love will be tested to the breaking point and beyond. For with Threadfall scant years away, the Dragonriders dare not expose themselves to infection, and it will fall to Kindan and his fellow apprentices to bravely search for a cure and save humanity.

The price of failure is unthinkable. But the price of success may be even harder to bear.

Dragon Harper Details

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From Reader Review Dragon Harper for online ebook

Angela says

Love this series of books. It's one of my all time favourites. I decided to re-read the entire Dragonriders of Pern series and over the past couple of months, I have been working my way through them all. Anne McCaffrey has such a wonderful, boundless imagination and such a vivid and descriptive style, her stories transport the reader into the fantastic world that she created and sweeps you up on the breathtaking adventures. Spellbinding!

Susan Kennedy says

Dragon harper was another book that was not out when I read this series the first couple of times. This was during the same time period as Dragon Kin and Dragon Fire. All of these have been exceptional reads.

There are some of the same characters in each of these books. Some of these characters are very likable. This one focuses on a plague that hits Pern. This a terrible plague and it takes the lives of so many. Kindan is an amazing character and he has been through all of these books. This one is mainly focused on him as a Harper apprentice and how he deals with so much.

This is just one more great addition to this wonderful collection of stories of Pern. I thoroughly enjoyed characters new and old. I wept for them and pulled for them. Another great work of art from Anne McCaffrey.

Sarah TheAromaofBooks says

[reviews of the first 19 Pern books available on my book blog]

Well, friends, this is a momentous post, as I believe it will be my final post about Pern! Yes, there are still four books after *Dragon Harper*, but I have been unable to work up the enthusiasm to get past the first 150 or so pages of *Dragonheart*, and so I believe that this may be the end of the series for me...

I already complained a bit about the direction this series went in my review of the last book, *Dragon's Fire*. I'm not even sure where to begin with why these books aren't anywhere close to as good as Anne's original stories.

One big thing is definitely that Todd McCaffrey seems incapable of really thinking of anything new to have happen, so he keeps going back and cover the same territory again and again. His timeline for his books is choppy and confusing as he jumps around all over the place with each book, reusing characters and events. In five books, we're covering only 15-20 years of history. There just isn't enough story to cover 2000+ pages of material.

Two big events happen in these 20 years: there's a devastating plague that kills a bunch of people. Then, there is a devastating dragon plague that kills a bunch of dragons. Two plagues in less than 20 years seems excessive, and also seems like lazy writing. It would already be boring if there was only one book about each of those events, but five books that cover those same two events repeatedly is just a complete yawn-fest.

Todd tries to make it interesting by inserting these other random events, like new information about the watch-whers (like I said, I actually enjoyed Todd's first book, *Dragon's Kin*) and the whole bit about finding better firestone, but it just isn't enough to keep things moving.

Another gigantic problem I have with these newer books is the sudden young age of the protagonists. This is adult fantasy/sci-fi, and the books have always been about adults. Now all of a sudden, they're about kids who are 12-14 years old, and it makes absolutely no sense. It was weird in *Dragon's Kin*, and a bit ridiculous in *Dragon's Fire* (plus creepy because of the whole 13-year-old kid having sex with someone several years older than him in a situation that definitely felt rape-like), and it's just plain absurd in *Dragon Harper*. The main character is Kindan, who was only 12 in *Dragon's Kin*, and so is only probably 13 in *Dragon Harper*. For some reason, we're supposed to believe that Kindan is really respected and liked by the MasterHarper (with no explanation as to why). For some reason, Kindan receives a fire lizard egg even though he just an apprentice (with no explanation as to why). Kindan isn't really great at anything that harpers do, yet for some reason is considered a very promising apprentice (with no explanation as to why). He doesn't Impress with a dragon, but instead of staying at the Weyr as unsuccessful candidates traditionally do, for some reason he returns to Harper Hall (with no explanation as to why). The Weyrleader really likes Kindan a lot and for some reason promises Kindan that he can come be the Weyr's Harper whenever he becomes a journeyman (but guess what... there's no explanation as to why). And on top of never bothering to explain literally anything, all these great things are happening to a 13-year-old kid. [insert lots of question marks here] (And this continues in *Dragonheart* with another protagonist who is just a kid, but everyone is all like, "Oh, wow, we are definitely going to give her so much respect even though we have no motivation or reason to do so!")

So Kindan has his little gang of outcasts at the Harper Hall, and they all get bullied by this tough kid. The tough kid insults a girl (or something like that??) so Kindan challenges him to an actual duel to the death, and everyone is just like, "Oh, okay, yeah that's totally his right." Say what?! Then, in this weird *Karate Kid* kind of music-montage, Kindan goes off for one week of training and comes back an actual fencing expert. And did I mention that he was also seriously injured the week before doing this training? So not only does he become a fencing expert, he does that all while still healing up? [insert lots of question marks here]

Of course, our 13-year-old hero wins the duel and doesn't kill his enemy, but instead makes the bully become his slave. Except then the bully becomes utterly devoted to Kindan and is like his bodyguard/sidekick. [insert lots of question marks here]

On top of all this, we have this totally weird thing where there are two girl apprentices, but they just sleep in the apprentice dormitory with all the boys?? And they all bathe in the same room?? And at the same time, Kindan falls in love with the Lord Holder's daughter and is having all these kissy times with her. So I'm supposed to believe that a 13-year-old boy is capable of sharing bathtime with girls in a totally cool, non-sexual way, while also sneaking off to make out with another girl, and also at the same time able to share a sleeping space with the kissy girl (long story) but manages to "behave himself" despite temptation....?? [insert lots of question marks here]

I said back at the beginning that I didn't really know where to start with all the problems I had with this book, but now I don't know where to stop. Should I stop with Kindan becoming the noble hero who works tirelessly to save people from the plague? (Except I'm also supposed to believe that there was only one Healer for a Hold of 10,000 people?) (And also, Kindan kind of sucks at the whole thing? Like he doesn't really come up with this great way to save people... they all still die. Yet everyone is like, "Oh, wow, Kindan, you're so amazing! We love you! Everything we have is yours!" And they basically throw flowers and kisses at him everywhere he goes and he is treated like a son of the Hold and adulated as a hero... with no real explanation as to why.) (And there is also this big thing where they realize the plague is killing all the people who are something like 16-24 years old or something like that, but then we never find out why so it just continues to make no sense with no actual explanation. There's an afterword that says, "Sometimes there are epidemics and they kill really healthy people." Okay... but why is that happening here? Why do we

emphasize it with no concept as to why??) Or should I stop with how all the Master Harpers die in the plague, but instead of making various journeymen the new masters, the new MasterHarper just randomly puts all Kindan's friends in charge of everything? (Because that's what I would do, put a bunch of 13-year-olds in charge of everything.) Should I stop with the fact that, for no reason that anyone ever explains, Kindan and his friends are taxed with the task of searching through all the Records for a way to help stop the plague? (Again. This is something that happens repeatedly, and I do mean repeatedly... *Oh, people are sick. We should search the Records. Let's have these random kids do it! That makes the most sense!*) Or the part where they actually do find something in the Records that may help, and then the adults who told them to search the Records totally blow them off? (*I know, let's have these random kids search through the Records to see if they can find any helpful information. Wait, you actually found something? Well, we don't have time to listen to you - you're just a kid! Run along now!*)

In short, this book *made no sense*. And to top it off, the characters were just terrible. They were wooden and boring. There was no connection between their actions and their thoughts - no real explanations or motivations. They were just pieces on the chessboard, being shoved here and there in an attempt to make something happen.

And that's really why I'm not finishing the series. *Dragonheart* is shaping up the same way. I can work up zero interest in the main character of that book because she makes zero sense. She just says and does things that are completely inconsistent. Combined with the fact that I already know the answers to all the "mysteries," and I already know how they are going to solve the problem of the dragon plague - since, you know, we already had an entire book written about this event - it's just too, too boring to justify continuing to plow through it.

This is an incredibly disappointing ending to a solid year of reading through Pern. While there were some ups and downs throughout, I give Anne McCaffrey's Pern books a solid 4/5 on the whole and, perhaps unbelievably, do actually want to read them again someday. But for now - and the future - I'll be giving Todd McCaffrey's contributions a miss.

Kristen Coffin says

"What is honor without love?"

Every time I see there's a Pern novel about a plague (and there have been many - at least a half dozen), I get worried, because a lot of them read the same. Or they're overlapping and covering the same time frame and are repetitive and confusing.

But I really like this one. I've always liked Kindan, and this plague straight from the Harper Hall is like watching doctors in a third world country. Like Florence Nightingale. Like seeing the original Red Cross start. It's sad and heartwrenching, but it's also full of hope. So it has all the aspects of a perfectly executed plague novel.

Cass says

Another book in which Todd McCaffrey attempts to have thirteen year old children behave as adults, complete with smoldering love scenes which conflict with the "we don't peek" bath scenes.

Kindan from Dragon's Kin returns and it is in this book that he really starts to get annoying. For such a young person his resume is ridiculously unbelievable. Harper apprentice and later Watch Wher handler. He discovers better firestone and attends an impression as a candidate. Friends with a great many dragonriders and respected by Weyr Leaders he is returned to harperhall. It turns out he has no harpering skills but is a dab hand at drum beats and has healing skills to rival the Masterhealer. He challenges a rival apprentice to a duel, which he wins after spending a week in the mountains learning skills from Obi Wan Kenobi.. I mean that old guy from Karate Kid.. Wait what movie are we watching?

After impressing a firelizard, bronze no less, and falling into Romeo and Juliet style love with the Lord Holders oldest daughter he uses his draconic contacts to get the dragon riders to feed and supply the holds before returning to harperhall where everyone is dead and so he and his pre-pubescent buddies all get big promotions and become leaders in the hall.

This is Todd McCaffrey's worst book.

Wait I am about to read Dragongirl I have heard rumours that that one is worse.

Luann says

I was so careful to read the four newest Pern books in publication order! But I think I would have enjoyed Dragon Harper MUCH more if I had read it BEFORE Dragonsblood. I guess it wasn't as much of an issue for me in reading Dragon's Fire because that storyline focused a lot on Pellar and Halla. While reading Dragon Harper, I had to keep reminding myself where these events fit into the storyline - mostly after Dragon's Kin and Dragon's Fire, but before Dragonsblood. Or at least before the Kindan part of the storyline from Dragonsblood.

Publication order of the "Todd" books: Dragon's Kin, Dragonsblood, Dragon's Fire, Dragon Harper, and then the soon-to-be-published Dragonheart.

Order I wish I would have read them: Dragon's Kin, Dragon's Fire, Dragon Harper, Dragonsblood, and then looks like Dragonheart (based on what I can glean from the book blurbs).

I'm giving this one three stars, although I would probably go 2.5 if that was an option. Did this story add anything new to the Pern saga? They've faced these types of sicknesses before - even though those technically came after this one in the timeline.

Vicki Jaeger says

I can't tell you how many times I've read this series. Just read this title again, and it still doesn't disappoint. Telepathic dragons, strong female characters, great relationships, and the Harpers' guild and music as a strong guiding force. What could be better?

In hindsight, I still enjoy reading the series in order written (versus actual chronological order of events). I especially like how McCaffrey shifts her point of view in different books, retelling the same events from someone else's perspective.

This is the third book written jointly with Todd McCaffrey, Anne's son. There was a bit more violence in this book (not a huge amount, just much more fighting/aggression than Anne ever wrote alone), sometimes the

characters emotions/driving forces are not fleshed out as well within the book. But this one is better than the last, and it feels like he's improving with practice.
On to the next Pern title!

rivka says

It's always nice to re-visit Pern, and the idea behind this book is a good one. Unfortunately, the characters are so poorly drawn that I just don't care very much about any of them. Kindan has appeared before, and I **still** don't feel like we know him at all.

Disappointing, especially when compared to the earlier Pern books dealing with another medical crisis -- *Moretta* and *Nerilka's Story*, which were far superior.

Joey V. says

One thing I hate is a lack of continuity. I don't mean that you have to keep to a strict script, but follow the rules that you set up for your world. Case in point: In the previous book, *Dragon's Fire* (spoilers coming, if you haven't read it yet...) the plot revolves around firestone, which explodes on contact with ANY moisture, cause dragons pain when they eat it, and cannot be eaten by fire-lizards. This is either never mentioned, or outright contradicts other books in the series. But the authors give us a little twist at the end, showing that it's not the same type of firestone we're used to. Problem solved! But in this book, we have occasional references to Dragonriders being immune to disease. Where did that come from? The entirety of *Moretta's* novel was about a plague that ravaged the entire population, including Dragonriders. At first I thought they were going to end with the idea that Dragonriders were just a healthier group, due to healthy living, proper diet, exercise, etc. But no, turns out that the healthiest folk seem to catch this plague the worst. So I keep reading, waiting for the twist at the end, see where they're gonna go with it...and they don't.

Here's why it's even worse. The Dragonriders still have to quarantine themselves, so the excuse of protecting the weyrfolk is created. We go through several pages of explanation for why the Dragonriders have to keep away from the sick to prevent spreading the disease to the weyrfolk, so that the weyrs can be at full strength when Thread falls. Why not "The Dragonriders have to quarantine themselves so **THEY** won't get sick, so that **THEY** will still be alive to fight Thread?" It works just as well, and without the retcon!

It wouldn't be such a glaring error if the very next book didn't begin with a scene, in either the first or second chapter, where Fort's Weyrwoman teases her Weyrleader about how he acts when he gets sick...

Still a good book. I really did like it. Just that sometimes a single flaw can pull you out of the story...

Carol says

This is my second time reading this particular book of Todd McCaffrey's and I am still not impressed. I rather liked *Dragon's Kin* (the first of his I read) and, on my first read of this book, thought it was alright. But my opinion is dropping fast as I reread it.

In this book, Kindan from *Dragon's Kin* is back, this time as an apprentice at Harper Hall. He's been there

for a Turn and a half now, meaning he's about 13 or 14 now as he is mentioned as just turned 12 in *Kin*. In this story, he deals with a bully at Harper Hall, impresses a fire lizard, develops feelings for a daughter of the Lord Hold of Fort, and tries to find a cure for the plague sweeping Pern. While this scenario seems interesting enough, the execution of it leaves a great deal to be desired as far as I am concerned. It was full of implausibilities and lacked character development.

First off, I have a serious problem with the Hatching scene at the beginning of the book with young Sonia suddenly becoming High Reaches Weyrwoman mere minutes after her Impression of the baby gold dragon. They only had *one* elderly gold dragon at High Reaches with Thread returning in about 15 Turns? Really? I would have thought that one of the other Weyrs would have an extra goldrider or two to send to High Reaches, but apparently not in Todd's vision of 2nd Interval Pern. Surely it would have made more sense for a more experienced queenrider from another Weyr be transferred in to become the new Weyrwoman than give the position to a young girl with a baby dragon. But from what I've read before, Todd seems fond of giving far too much responsibility to young teens and preteens as well as giving them a somewhat unrealistic level of maturity.

There are brief mentions of a couple of Todd-included additions to Pernese culture/fact that bother me, namely the Shunned and firestone that explodes when wet (Seriously, why exactly did he decide that was necessary anyways? More drama?). I know that those are explained further in his other books, but quite frankly this one isn't making me want to read those other books. Also, what's up with his decision to (temporarily) have dragonriders abandon Igen Weyr due to drought in the area? Is that explained in his other books? It seems a bit ridiculous and unnecessary to me as I know Igen Weyr must eventually be repopulated as it exists in books set later chronologically.

Now, as for Kindan and the bully Vaxoram at Harper Hall, I feel that the whole duel situation is rather implausible. The adults including Masterharper Murrenny and M'tal didn't seem to have any problems allowing a pair of apprentices to duel, possibly to the death. As far as I am aware, apprentices are not considered legal adults on Pern so the supposedly responsible adults don't seem to have any problem letting children duel and possibly kill each other. Really? I find that highly unrealistic and doubt that any of the 9th Pass CraftMasters (Robinton, Fandarel, Oldive, etc.) would have allowed their apprentices to challenge each other to duels. Then to top off the questionable situation, Kindan actually manages to defeat the older, stronger, and longer trained boy with just a week of additional, albeit intense training. The fact that Vaxoram stops causing trouble eventually comes around to become Kindan's friend is also unrealistic. Additionally, I found a continuity error during the conversation Kindan has with Murrenny, M'tal, and Detallor right after Vaxoram's defeat: Kindan says that he had three older brothers, but in *Dragon's Kin* he is the youngest of nine with one named older sister and four named older brothers (I can't remember if the other three siblings are ever identified either by name or gender).

Seriously, are all the adults in this book completely irrational? With fears of a plague sweeping Pern, the Masterharper leaves the important search through the Records to a single young apprentice and his friends who volunteer to assist him. Why not devote more people to the search or older Harpers or even the Archivist Master Resler? Speaking of Master Resler, he seems to have his priorities out of order. He basically freaks out at Kindan when Kindan thinks he's found something in the Records from 389/390 and all Master Resler is concerned with is the fact that Kindan wasn't looking in the Benden Hold records like he was supposed to be, but in Records from Lemos Hold. Does it really matter that much which Records the information on the plague is found in as long as it's found?

Once the story progresses to the actual fight against the plague, the story improves somewhat. It's still definitely not as good as Moreta or Nerilka's Story as far as plague-on-Pern stories go, but I like it better than the first half of the book. Maybe Kindan and the others are just too busy trying to survive and cope with the plague to be stupid or behave irrationally. While Kindan's contributions to fighting the plague (masks, the idea for temperature-measuring paste, and how to get dragonrider aid without infecting the riders) are not

rocket science or particularly complex, they are fairly appropriate and accomplishable when considering his age, skills, and life experience.

Furthermore, while I liked Kindan in *Dragon's Kin*, I feel that this book has Kindan becoming just *too* perfect to remain a sympathetic, realistic protagonist for the reader. He strongly bugs me in this book as he's too good in some areas with no explanation for possessing those skills, highly respected by important people on Pern out of contrast with his actual skills and achievements, and given far more responsibility than he should have been, being only a 14-Turn-old apprentice Harper. He made a good wher-handler until he gave up his watch-wher to Nuella then he went off to Harper Hall recommended by the highly respected Master Zist. He stood as a candidate for Impression at High Reaches Weyr and has the respect of multiple dragonriders including Benden's Weyrleader who wants him as a Weyr Harper once he makes Journeyman. He improved his skill with a sword enough in a mere week to defeat Vaxoram. He's even good enough with herbals to be offered an opportunity to become a healer. It's just not realistic for him to be that good at everything. To be fair, the author seems to have tried to give him flaws, clumsiness from his growth spurt and his feelings of inadequacy as a Harper apprentice (Nevermind that he was good enough at singing and drumming for Mast Zist to recommend him!), but the attempted flaws just make him less believable as a character. All in all, Kindan's abilities are out of proportion with his age and the background he is given in *Dragon's Kin* and he shouldn't be as extraordinary as everyone in the books seems to think he is.

Overall, this book pales in comparison to *Moreta*, so if you're looking for a Pern book involving plague I'd highly recommend picking up that one instead of this one. However, I feel that this book did improve somewhat from the first half of the story to the second half, so it is a bit better than my initial impression during this reread. It's either my least or second-to-least favorite Pern novel along with *Dragonsblood* (the other Todd McCaffrey written Pern novel that I've read). I think I'll stick to rereading Anne McCaffrey's Pern and ignoring the rest of Todd's books. I'm still going to give *Dragon Harper* 2 stars out of 5 as while I don't like it much, I still don't hate it enough to give it a 1.

Natasha says

Third *Rainy Day* read while the kids are in school. This is the one Pern book that has always made me cry. To me a story becomes amazing when it feels as if you the reader are there in the world you are reading. Every time I reread this book I can see the sick and dying, I can feel the horror of the mass graves and it reminds me of narratives from Europe during the plague years. This book makes me cry and grieve and to me the fact that any author can make a description of fiction feel so real is the mark of a great author.

Keiji Miashin says

Much like its characters, which have to deal with a plague, this book too suffers from something debilitating and deadly.

Unfinished-ness.

From the very beginning the book is striking in its emptiness. There is nothing here for a long time reader to grind their teeth on. Every aspect of the writing is either minimal, bare bones, or has been covered better in prior books.

The first chapter is liable to confuse readers as it focuses, in a limited third person perspective, on one boy

and provides no hint that another, Kindan, is the book's true protagonist. This makes the transition between chapters 1 and 2 jarring and confusing.

Adding to the confusion is a veritable letter soup of names. These characters are thrown at us in the first two chapters with little description or preamble.

In fact, if there is one thing the book does most horribly wrong it is description. Mainly, the fact that there is none. Reading this book I could tell you that the Harper Hall has some Apprentice dormitories, and Fort Hold a Great Hall. What these locations (or any locations in the book) look like I couldn't tell you. The book NEVER describes. It mentions things but never elaborates, never pontificates, leaving all events to occur in a vague white space of slightly differing locales.

The one thing the book does tell us are the characters, but that's not a good thing. We are TOLD that a certain character likes to draw, for example, but never once in the story do they do so nor do other characters comment on their work. I subscribe to the adage: "Show, don't tell." And the book is as far away from following it that one can possibly be without cutting out dialogue entirely.

Speaking of the dialogue, it's unique. By which I mean that if I took out all the 'he said's' and 'she said's,' and just placed names in front of every line of text there would be little change in the text. THAT is how little description and prose can be found in this book.

The lack of any text describing setting, emotion, actions, etc. leads to the creation of a whirlwind of activity where characters move from place to place because someone somewhere said so. There is no depth here, no introspection for either the reader or the characters. No growth, no development. The few characters that do exhibit some of those two are forced and rushed through those changes since there is no descriptive text of them changing. This makes their shift in standing and behavior jarring.

All of these things together make me feel like this is NOT a book. This is, perhaps, a second draft. A manuscript that COULD be a good book if the author(s) had spent even another year actually WRITING some prose into it.

2 Stars. Barely. Because it's bad, but not just yet horrible enough for 1.

Maree says

This was a bit of a depressing book, but again, so realistic in what could happen to a growing society. Plague. It was a solid story for the most part, but a bit obvious in the end when it should have been the most soulful.

Jane Irish Nelson says

Very hard to put down. This book once again focuses on Kindan, who is pursuing his studies at the Harper Hall. He makes friends there, along with one enemy — a bully, who he must learn how to deal with. Then the story changes and becomes much darker as an illness sweeps across the planet. Since Thread will return in just a few years, the dragonriders shut themselves up in their weyr to avoid infection, otherwise there might not be enough of them to defend the planet. Kindan works tirelessly to fight the plague, maturing beyond his years in the process. Another excellent book in this series. Highly recommended.

Kathy Martin says

DRAGON HARPER stars apprentice harper Kindan. It begins with him standing up for the girl apprentices from bullying by an older apprentice Vaxoram. They fight a duel with the loser becoming a servant to the winner. Kindan wins and is determined to redeem Vaxoram. But events intervene....

A new virulent plague is infesting all of Pern and threatens to kill everyone. The Dragonriders need to stay away from the infected Holds because Pern won't survive the next Threadfall without the Dragonriders. And it isn't long before the trusted elders at Harper Hall succumb to it, leaving the fate of Pern in the hands of Kindan and his fellow apprentices.

There is a romance too. Both the Lord Holder's daughter Koriana and Kindan impress two from a clutch of fire lizards and fall in love. But the Lord Holder isn't going to let his daughter marry a lowly harper.

This was an entertaining story that makes me eager to read the next book in the Pern series.

Doris says

This book didn't really give me a reference to tell how to relate it back to the originals (was it before or after the Oldtimers came forward?). The overall theme was already used - old time disease decimates the world and is saved through clever reuse of ancient history. Where was it used before? Moreta's Ride.

Unfortunately it appears that Todd will be doing more of the writing in the future, but the books I have read with him as author/co-author tend towards the stale side, with reuse of plots and characters and a plot that could stand a little more thinking.

This book reused Kindan and Aleesa, but without the deep caring and conviction that made their earlier appearances so strong. An example - Kindan goes against everything he knows to spend time with a woman he knows he shouldn't, but in a way that could destroy his life. He didn't think (although most young men in the grip of hormones would have trouble in this scene).

However, what bothered me was that the duel scene, while potentially an outstanding method of ending bullying (but not likely as anyone who has weathered bullying knows), the whole scene seemed lame, and afterwards, while Kindan wins, it almost felt as if he lost. His opponent becomes his servant, and then he promptly forgets about him except when it becomes easier to use the guy as a gofer. It just felt as if there was more to be done here for the emotional growth of both young men.

(Actually, my experience tells me that someone who, coming back into training after a major injury and worked half to death in training, would never be able to compete in anything athletic, let alone win. He would have to have been super-athletic to begin with to accomplish this feat.)

Also, I never figured out why the title was "Dragon Harper", since, although Kindan tried to Impress, we never see a lot more of him interacting with dragons after that. In fact, one of the mainstays of previous books has been that Candidates stay in the Weyr to try again. Kindan just went tamely back to Harper Hall.

He then figures out all by himself a way to overcome the plague, and does all the healer stuff, losing all his

helpers along the way, but getting praise and accolades from the people he saves. When the awards are handed out, he barely gets promoted to journeyman, and as a harper at that, when he did almost no harper tasks for the major portion of the book... bah humbug to quote a phrase.

Todd McCaffrey may have grown up around Pern, but he doesn't have the "voice" to portray the characters nor the imagination to make it real for those 200-500 pages the way his mother does. As another reviewer said "Putting the name McCaffery on this book doesn't make this good."

It just was not a good book. Easily read, easily forgettable, with characters that don't persuade you to stick around visit. The brief glimpses we get of Pern itself make it obvious that "you had to be there" as in you already need to be very familiar with Pern in order to read this.

Benjamin says

The plot of this book had a lot of turns I didn't expect. All the twists turned it to a very emotional book because every early easy out for the suffering of the characters is passed up in favor of a much deeper and more meaningful plot. It's easily one of the better books in the entire Pern series.

Evelynn says

I quite enjoyed this book, although it made me misty eyed. It was also sad but triumphant. I could sort of tell what parts of the plot were Todd's and which part's were Anne's. I like the characters but there was some confusing moments.

Hallie says

What I learned (yet again) from this book: Anne McCaffrey should never have let her son get involved in the Pern books. Not that she's a top-quality writer herself, but she does know how to create a world that is interesting enough you want to keep coming back to it despite the flaws in her prose. Her son clearly doesn't live in that world the same way she does. This book is completely shallow, the characters are one-dimensional (the one attempt at an evolution of personality happens in an implausible blink of an eye) and you really don't care all that much when they get killed off. Sloppy, sloppy work. Hand the keyboard back to your mother.

Edward McKeown says

Dragon Harper Todd McCaffery

Stale characters running through a cardboard plot. Sadly this sums up the latest return to the Pern, the world of dragons. We have been here before but in better company. In a strange choice for this book, the thing that Pern is most known for is notably missing, dragons, the telepathic and empathic companions of this forgotten colony of humans deposited on Pern. The dragons and their lesser cousins, watch-weyrs and firelizards were genetically engineered so long ago that for most of Pern's history, their origins were lost. Here they make

only rare appearances and we are not bonded with them nor do we hear dragon voices.

Dragon Harper is the story of Kindan, a boy from a mining community who, in a previous book has become admitted to Harper Hall. Here at “Harper High” Kindan the young apprentice gets into dispute with school bully (Pern seems overrun with these) Vaxoram over a girl. Clueless masters seem to run the place and permit the two to fight an actual duel. Once again the stew of clichés is used to move around characters who seem to have no organic motivation.

The duel itself is improbable, with Kindan overcoming a larger, more powerful and better-trained swordsman after a week’s training. As a black belt and former fencer I can assure you that it isn’t persuasive, people don’t learn this stuff this fast. Equally improbable, the bully goes on to become a devoted friend. Also something I haven’t seen in real life. I fought a bully once and got respect, but friendship from such a person was neither wanted nor forthcoming.

Kindan is prospering at Harper Hall when once again a plague devastates Pern. One wonders why there are such plagues on Pern. The colonists who were originally sent out would have been healthy and not brought such organisms with them in their bodies or their animals. It’s unlikely that an alien organism would infect creatures from another world. I’m closer to a pine tree than I’d be to any creature that was native Pernese life. If something did jump from alien life to Terran life it would probably be 100% fatal as there would be no resistance to it at all. Well perhaps something fell somewhere as Woody Allen liked to say.

Improbabilities pile up in this book. In the province of Fort Hold, with a population of around 10,000, the sole healer dies of plague. It falls to Kindan to replace him, apparently there are no other medical personnel. This is repeated as Kindan’s friends step into positions of authority as other Masters die. We don’t know why the Master Harper favors Kindan, nor why it falls to three youngsters to search records for the answers to Pern’s survival. You would think that this would have been handled at higher level with greater assets. Apparently Kindan’s friends are the best and the brightest, quite a posse. It strains credulity that this early teen would be the only qualified person or that the adults would defer to him and his friends in battling a plague. This is the stuff of Saturday morning cartoons.

Voice is an issue in this book. While the character is a teen (if his age is ever specified I missed it) his voice is that of a much older person and as a result I never bought this character. He even seems nebulous physically, there’s little description of him and I never had a visual picture to follow. Beyond modest talents as a harper there seems little to recommend Kindan as a protagonist. Unlike Jaxom, an earlier hero from “White Dragon” who is clearly a young man of promise, Kindan doesn’t impress with wit or intellect. So why is this our protagonist? Why is he gifted with the high honor of a fire-lizard when others more deserving and of higher rank are not? Why does he rise so far so fast?

Kindan’s relatively minor contributions to weathering the disease (thermometer paste and face masks) don’t really influence the course of the epidemic. He doesn’t really alter the course of anything in this book. He simply observes and weathers it. Perhaps realistic but hardly inspiring. So this is neither a coming of age book, nor a heroic adventure nor one of those books where a small struggle becomes symbolic of a larger battle or issue. It’s just sort of there.

Torches are not easily passed (as we can see from the Olympics this year) and unfortunately it seems that this fails more often than it succeeds. We can also see this in the pastiches written by writers teamed with the great Andre Norton. The add-ons authors may be good individually (or not) they may love Norton but they are not Norton and the resulting product is the worst sort of compromise in nobody’s voice. The bonds of family are not enough to make up for the fact that Todd is not the writer that his mother is. Putting the name McCaffery on this book doesn’t make this good. One really feels that the franchise is being milked like Stars Wars or Forgotten Realms or some other “product” that is just filling shelves with inked wood pulp as opposed to real books.

One of the more difficult things to do in a long run series is to make each book fresh and yet to provide enough of the back story that a new reader is not lost. Dragon Harper does not succeed in this. You'll have difficulty figuring out Pern and how and why it works. Nor will you find it persuasive. It's as if the author didn't feel he had to come up with a viable functioning society.

The Pros: This is an amiable little tale, which if you had not read the vastly better and more original stories might serve to whet a taste for Pern. But why would you enter Pern here rather than through the best-selling "White Dragon?" Why soldier with Kindan when you could ride with Moreta and scream involuntarily NO! at her fate. When your fists could clench and your eyes narrow as Lessa confronts her enemies. Or when your heart could be in your throat as you watch every dragon on Pern roar into the air, to literally form a living ramp with their bodies, saving F'nor and his dragon Canth from plunging to the ground after their assault on the Red Star...well may be there weren't really any pros for this book after all.

The Cons: Weak characters who are either clichés, pale copies of earlier characters from the series, or mere devices to move the recycled plot along. Improbable action scenes and too little time spent on what makes Pern special, dragons.

Rating 4 stars out of 10

By Edward McKeown with the assistance of noted dragon-rider Schelly Keefer.
