

I. THE AGE BEFORE MEN

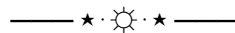
Before the first human ever opened their eyes to the world, the land already breathed with a life of its own.

Dragons were the first to arrive—or perhaps they had always existed, woven into the very essence of the world like golden threads in an ancient tapestry. No one knows for certain, and dragons themselves contradict one another depending on their mood. What is known is that they precede everything, and they make sure no one forgets it.

Their power is a living thing: unstable, excessive, overwhelming. A single mating ritual between two adult dragons can split mountains in half, boil oceans, erase entire villages from existence as though they had never been there. Not out of malice—simply out of grandeur. Dragons do not fit within the world; the world adapts to them. At least, that is what they believe.

Such power has always been accompanied by an ego of equal proportions. Dragons are creatures of absolute vanity. They enjoy being watched, admired, invoked in prayers, and painted onto murals. When the first humans appeared and fell to their knees before them, dragons considered it not only understandable, but inevitable.

Today, humans officially classify them as high-magnitude magical creatures—terminology dragons tolerate with poorly concealed condescension. "High magnitude," they often say, "is a remarkably modest way to describe the creation of the world."



Alongside dragons, the ancient world was inhabited by a constellation of species:

The fae, small and dangerously intelligent, wove magic through the air as naturally as sewing thread through cloth. Their night markets existed long before the first human cities, and their bargains rarely ended well for those who neglected to read the fine print beneath firefly light.

The gnomes lived in the folds of the world—beneath stones, within roots, behind waterfalls. Masters of illusion and of making anyone laugh at the worst possible moment. They consider humor a form of magic every bit as powerful as any spell.

The elves, as proud as marble pillars and equally difficult to move, carried with them wisdom accumulated over millennia—and never missed an opportunity to mention it. Their moral superiority was, according to themselves, a matter of fact rather than opinion.

The orcs were warriors by nature and poets by choice. Their rigid matriarchal societies honored strength but respected eloquence. Contrary to all expectations, they developed over the centuries a reputation for chivalry that completely bewildered the other races.

The merfolk inhabited the coasts and the depths, silent guardians of currents and tides. Their relationship with the terrestrial world was distant and selective—except when it came to children, for whom they nurtured an inexplicable and unconditional tenderness.

And then there were the leviathans.

Abyssal creatures of impossible size, leviathans were not exactly sociable. They dwelled in the deep with the conviction of beings who know the world belongs to them and that any uninvited presence is a personal insult. Their feud with dragons—perhaps the oldest and most ridiculous rivalry in existence—began over one simple and non-negotiable issue: fish.

Dragons, meddlers by nature, occasionally dipped their claws into aquatic territories without the slightest concern for boundaries. Leviathans, territorial down to the last bone in their colossal bodies, considered this a declaration of war. Neither side yielded. Neither side ever will. The feud has lasted for ages and will continue forever, sustained equally by the pride of both parties.

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE BLUE BARBARIANS

Humans arrived in the world without a history and built one quickly.

With them came things the world had never known before: unchecked ambition, resentment, envy, despair—emotions that did not exist within the older races with the same corrosive intensity. The world, sensitive to everything that dwells within it, reacted.

From humanity's darkest emotions—from bottled hatred, from shame with nowhere to go, from grief that turned into poison—were born the Blue Barbarians.

Giants of ice with skin the color of a winter sky, pupil-less eyes, and voices that echoed like avalanches. They emerged after all the other races, yet rapidly became the greatest threat the world had ever known. They wielded dark magic with terrifying familiarity—for they were made from it. They did not need to learn it. In essence, they were magic itself, given form through destruction.

The First War Tide was brutal and long. Humans, fae, elves, orcs, gnomes, and merfolk—races that rarely agreed on anything—united for the first time against a common enemy. Dragons, at the time, watched from afar with the detachment of beings who did not yet consider the Blue Barbarians worthy of their attention.

In the end, the Barbarians were driven into the far northern reaches—a region that until then had neither name nor history.

That changed immediately.

The moment the Blue Barbarians settled there, the land transformed. Warmth vanished. The earth cracked beneath the cold. Snow buried everything within hundreds of miles, and where plains and forests once stood arose what the world would come to know as The Death Desert—an endless expanse of ice and cutting winds where nothing grows and everything freezes before it has the chance to live.

The problem was that this new wasteland expanded into the habitats of other magical species. Fae territories were swallowed whole. Ancient migration routes vanished beneath the snow. The old balance of the world was broken.

And so the Blue Barbarians achieved something no enemy had ever accomplished before:

They became the enemies of absolutely everyone.

Including the dragons.

III. THE NATURE OF THE BARBARIANS

What makes the Blue Barbarians especially dangerous is not merely their size or their magic—it is their permanence.

When humans learned how to purge their negative emotions, they severed the original source. Blue Barbarians stopped emerging spontaneously from human despair. But by then, they were already a civilization. They had memory, hierarchy, and centuries of accumulated knowledge in dark magic. They could reproduce on their own and lived for hundreds of years.

Eradicating them would never be a matter of cutting the root.

The root had already grown too large.

Their dark magic evolved throughout centuries of isolation within the Death Desert. They learned to manipulate ice as an extension of their own bodies, corrupt enemy spells at their source, and create magical traps with surgical precision. Eventually, they discovered that the power of dragons—that primordial force as old as the world itself—could be consumed.

And that discovery sealed the fate of the alliance that would follow.

IV. THE ALLIANCE AND THE DRAGON RIDERS

The Blue Barbarians' advance toward dragon nesting territories was what finally moved the dragons to action.

Hunted systematically and lured into elaborate dark-magic traps designed to exploit their greatest weaknesses—their immense egos and explosive tempers—dragons began to fall.

One by one.

Each death was irreparable, for dragons are not easily born, and every one of them carries centuries of history within.

The problem was structural: dragons in battle are devastating, but unpredictable. Rage blinds them. Pride makes them predictable to enemies who know how to provoke them. Alone, they were losing.

It was an ancient dragoness named Varreth the Gray—one of the few surviving alphas—who proposed the unthinkable:

To accept human guidance on the battlefield.

The silence that followed lasted three days.

In the end, logic prevailed over pride. The dragons agreed.

And thus, the Dragon Riders were born.

V. THE RITUAL OF THE MAGNA MOON

Once every year, when the moon swells until it occupies a third of the sky—an event known as the Magna Moon—the Bonding Ritual is held.

That night, the moon does not reflect sunlight. It pulses with its own luminescence, silver threaded with veins of gold that seem to flow like water currents. Beneath its glow, the earth grows faintly warm, as though the world itself were breathing.

The candidates for dragon rider—chosen after years of training, emotional-control trials, and magical endurance tests—arrive at the Field of Verath, a circular plain of polished stone whose center is marked by an ancient crater. Elders claim it was left by the first dragon ever to land upon the world.

The dragons arrive on their own from every direction and settle around the outer perimeter of the field without ceremony or order—yet, for reasons no one can explain, never overlapping one another.

The ritual begins when the Arcane of the Bond—a mage trained exclusively for this ceremony, a position passed from master to apprentice for generations—draws the Circle of Echo at the center of the crater. The symbol is crafted from the ashes of a fallen rider's pyre, powdered dragon scale, and the voluntary blood of the candidate.

When completed, the circle glows briefly before fading.

From that moment onward, it is the dragon who chooses.

No one truly knows what a dragon feels at that instant. Dragons themselves rarely answer clearly when asked. One once described it as recognizing a voice you have never heard before. Another said it felt like remembering something that has not happened yet. A third merely snorted smoke and walked away.

The chosen dragon approaches.

The candidate must not move—any retreat is interpreted as a break in intent and voids the bond before it can form.

The dragon lowers its head until its snout nearly touches the candidate's forehead.

And then the Echo occurs.

A wave of heat and cold at once. Sudden clarity—as though a fog the rider never knew existed had been stripped away in an instant.

And within their chest, where once there had only been a single heartbeat, something new.

Something far too large to have a name.

The bond has formed.

But it is not yet complete.

The emotional connection is immediate. Rider and dragon begin to feel one another's pain, fear, joy, and anger.

Yet telepathic communication—the privilege of hearing a dragon's voice within one's own mind, a gift dragons normally reserve only for their own kind—is granted only when the dragon decides the rider has earned it.

That might happen the next day.

It might take months.

There are recorded cases that took nearly two years.

During this intermediate period, rider and dragon live together. Train together. Learn one another.

The rider learns to read emotions flowing through the bond like weather patterns—the static crackle of irritation, the gentle warmth of contentment, the heavy pressure of sorrow.

The dragon observes.

Evaluates.

And decides, in its own time and without warning, whether the rider is someone worth sharing its voice with.

The moment it happens for the first time is described differently by every rider.

But nearly all of them use the same word:

Irreversible.

VI. THE MODERN WORLD

The Human Kingdom, Vindhara, was never intended to become what it is today.

It began as a territory of reconstruction after the early wars and slowly became the gravitational center of a fractured world.

As the Death Desert expanded and the Blue Barbarians rendered vast regions uninhabitable, entire races sought refuge.

The Human Kingdom welcomed them.

Not always gracefully.

Not always without friction.

But it welcomed them.

The result is a civilization that defies classification.

In the larger cities, it is perfectly normal to enter a fae tavern at three in the afternoon and leave at three in the morning with only a vague understanding of what happened in between. Gnomes establish market stalls where they sell customized illusions, create impossible wagers, and make even the most serious elves laugh involuntarily—a fact elves later deny with absolute conviction. Elves and dragons frequent the same intellectual salons and turn every philosophical debate into a subtle competition over who has been correct for longer.

Cats—a constant presence throughout the kingdom—wander among all of this with practiced indifference that both dragons and elves recognize on a deeply personal level. The silent competition among the three for the title of most imposing creature without trying remains one of the kingdom's most consistently entertaining spectacles.

None of them admit the competition exists.

All of them take it very seriously.

Along the coast, the merfolk stand watch. They are creatures of few words with adults and infinite patience with children. In coastal cities, it is customary for mothers to bring their daughters to the rocks at low tide. The merfolk emerge from the water, sit upon the stones, and braid hair with hands that never tremble.

They charge nothing.

They offer no explanation.

They simply do it.

Interracial unions have become increasingly common. The orcs, in particular, developed over the centuries a reputation as extraordinarily attentive partners, surprising anyone who knows them only by appearance and not by their habit of arriving with flowers unprompted.

Today, orc hybrids are among the most common people in the kingdom, often inheriting both impressive stature and an instinctive tendency to hold doors open for those walking behind them.

VII. NOTES ON DRAGONS

Hierarchy:

Dragons are divided into alphas, betas, and omegas—not by strength, but by an innate nature that manifests while still inside the egg and never changes.

Alphas are an absolute minority. Monogamous by instinct and jealous in a way that transcends mere possessiveness—it is almost cosmological. Once bonded to someone, whether another dragon or a rider, an alpha quietly reorganizes its entire existence around that connection.

They rarely admit this aloud.

Betas are balance incarnate—the species' natural diplomats, the ones capable (in theory) of moderating their egos enough to negotiate. Most dragons who accept riders are betas.

Omegas are the most unpredictable. Not the weakest—the most intense. Their emotions come in greater waves, and their power is less controlled and more instinctive. Riders bonded to omega dragons undergo additional emotional-resilience training, because what comes through the bond can be overwhelming.

On Funerals:

When a rider dies, the ceremony follows an ancient rite. The body is placed upon a pyre built from Ashwood Trees, a species that grows only along the borders of the Field of Verath.

The rider's dragon lights the pyre.

Dragonfire used in this ritual is not orange.

It is white.

Dragons may bond with new riders after a period of mourning—the Arcane of the Bond recommends a minimum of one year—but the first bond never truly disappears. It remains like a scar where the Echo once resided: warm and ever-present.

Dragons do not speak of it.

But sometimes, on nights of the Magna Moon, they stare across the empty field with an expression any human would recognize immediately.

They hate being caught wearing it.