



Elessad, previously known as Athanasia, is a fantasy planet with a long history; though it has previously been ruled by both medieval and space-faring races, the humans of the modern era utilize both scavenged, advanced technology, and newly-innovated magic to create a steampunk-esque society roughly equivalent in technology to the turn of the 20th century on Earth. The native dragon species have slowly but steadily built an offworld presence among the worlds of the Nexus. The current version of Elessadian dragons I've developed here is mostly the same as what was previously sent out to the Nexus; for any discrepancies that may have developed, I have tried to include an IC rationalization.

Terms

Host: A sentient being bonded to an Elessadian dragon. Their bond, bondmate, or rider.

Attachment: The process of linking an Elessadian's lifeforce to that of their host. Bonding, Impressing.

Pack: The term for a group of Elessadian dragons.

Physical traits

Elessadian dragons are non-mammalian synapsids. They show some but not all traits of mammals. They are warm-blooded, have hair-like quills on their necks and backs while the rest of their body is scaled, and lay soft, leathery eggs kept warm and moist by the mother until they hatch, at which point they are mostly self-sufficient.

They are a six-limbed species with four legs and two wings. They have a long-limbed feline build and walk on their toes, digitigrade. Their paws have three digits plus a dewclaw, all with retractable claws; similarly, their wings have a dewclaw-like digit at the second joint and three wing tines connected by webs of scaled flesh that allow them to fly.

Elessadian dragons' keratin-based scales cover nearly their entire body; only the pawpads on their feet and toes and their spine are missing them. On the wingsails, the scales are still present, but become so small and fine that the wings appear to have smooth skin. These scales act as protective armor and importantly, are impervious to magic. Their feet and toes have thick, fleshy pads similar to those of a cat or dog. From the back of their head and neck to the base of the tail, there runs a thick growth of quill-like spines forming a crest that can be raised or lowered at will. These spines are raised in threat displays, but if the dragon chooses, they can lay the spines flat so a human can ride on their back.

They have a long, flexible tail tipped with a sharp-edged spade and two long horns sweeping backwards from above the eyes. They also have a third, very small horn at the tip of their nose. Their eyes have slit pupils and come in colors ranging from pale gold to dark brown, sometimes red-toned, and very rarely blue or green. This is not linked to their scale color.

Abilities

Elessadian dragons have excellent long-distance vision and see well at night. Their sense of hearing is very good; their ears are reduced to tiny holes at the base of their horns, which work to amplify sounds. Their sense of smell and taste are lacking, however.

They do not possess telepathy. They speak a verbal language, though with a sibilant accent. Their parents teach them some basic vocabulary in the shell, but the majority of language is picked from their host's mind right after attachment. They also make non-verbal, feline-esque growls, roars, purrs, and hisses.

All Elessadian dragons possess an innate fire-breathing ability, and their scales repel magic. It *is* possible to affect them with magic--they are cursed, after all--but it is very difficult and requires a lot of power and a lot of luck.

Colors

They come in eight distinct colors, always solid, though the shades can vary from dragon to dragon. (*Very* occasionally, there will be a genetic throwback that doesn't fit into the established hierarchy. The dragon genome was not always restricted in the way it is now.) Larger dragons are both rarer and are considered a higher rank compared to smaller colors. From most common to least common:

Green (female) and blue (male). 20-25 feet long and average 6.5 feet at the shoulder. They comprise approximately 40% of dragons.

Yellow (female) and orange (male). 25-30 feet long and average 7.5 feet at the shoulder. About 30% of dragons.

Red (female) and brown (male). 30-35 feet long and average 8.5 feet at the shoulder. About 20% of dragons.

White (female) and black (male). 35-40 feet long and average 9.5 feet at the shoulder. About 10% of dragons.

Each color can lay/sire eggs of their rank or lower; occasionally when two dragons of the same rank mate, they produce eggs of the rank above them.

Behaviour

Elessadian dragons are sapient, but tend to be more aggressive and territorial than humans and other sapient species. They have been known to kill humans who encroach on their territory when they believe themselves threatened. On their home planet of Elessad, they are widely regarded as unpredictable and dangerous beasts, though not all dragons agree. Their reputation is overblown, but not entirely baseless. Smaller colors tend to be calmer and more social than the larger ones.

Elessadian dragons are mostly solitary, but can live in small groups if necessary with minimal friction. Larger dragons usually dominate smaller ones, and the larger the pack, the stricter the hierarchy will be among them. Larger packs will form a strict hierarchy separated by gender, led by the strongest white and/or black, with each dragon having its own place in the pack. While they may compete for dominance, they tend to use non-violent challenges to determine rank. That said, Elessadian dragons are still people first, and as such, will not always fit neatly into stereotypical roles.

Lifecycle

Elessadian dragons are adults at five years of age. At this point, the females go into heat every 2-5 years, though they may choose not to mate. Their cycle can be unpredictable; in general, the longer it's been since they mated, and the smaller their last clutch was, the more likely they are to go into heat.

Once the female makes her intentions known, the males will gather to mock-fight or race each other, or otherwise try to impress her until she chooses a mate. The female gestates the eggs inside her body for about seven months; they are only laid a week before they hatch, so gathering potential hosts early is imperative. Larger dragons tend to lay larger clutches, but this is not an absolute rule. Clutches range from around five eggs to fifteen. A brooding female has an overwhelming protective instinct and may need to be restrained in order to avoid injuring potential hosts.

Dragons match the lifespan of their host, but if allowed to live out their natural lifespan, they can live for up to three centuries.

Their natural habitat is mountainous terrain, but they can thrive anywhere. On Elessad, they live almost exclusively in the Dragon Keep, but off-world pairs can live wherever they like. (Dragon and host can actually live up to ten miles away from their bond without ill effects.)

Bonding

All extant Elessadian dragons are under a bloodline curse which forces them to tie themselves to the life force of another sentient being or die.* They must bond ("Attach") within an hour after hatching or have their life force drained away until death. They can form a bond with any nearby,

sapient creature, including non-Elessadian dragons, borrowing their host's energy or lifeforce to replenish their own. The experience can be overwhelming at first, causing dizziness, mental confusion, and exhaustion, but fades to a barely-noticeable trickle of energy after the first hour. This hour is also when the hatchling has the opportunity to share thoughts and memories with their host, learning language and choosing a name. After an hour, the mental connection fades as well, leaving an empathic connection between the two which allows them to sense the other's emotions, but no more than that.

The attachment, once formed, cannot be broken except by death. Should their host die, the dragon will follow within an hour, unless they find and bond another suitable person within that time frame. This is extremely rare. The death of an Elessadian dragon causes a magical backlash, injuring and often killing the host. Even the lucky survivors often suffer some permanent injury, be it physical, mental, or spiritual. They will not be able to attach another Elessadian dragon, though they may be able to bond another Nexus species with the help of a healer.

*Theoretically, a skilled mage could discover a way to break the curse. This would cure the dragon directly affected by the curse as well as their future children, but not other living Elessadian dragons.

It's also possible that some Elessadian dragons escaped into the Nexus prior to the time when the spell was cast. Even if these dragons return to Elessad later, neither they nor their descendants will be affected by the curse, unless they mate with a dragon who is.

If an Elessadian dragon under the Bloodline curse mates with a non-Elessadian, all the resulting children and *their* descendants will be under the curse as well, until someone breaks it. (But I'm not going to go around policing it, certainly not after multiple generations.)

Naming

Shortly after hatching when the hatchling dragon receives most of their language skills, they will pick a name they like the sound of. Very often, this will be a short phrase from a poem or song (may be real or made up) or they may choose a word that has a particular meaning to their bond.

History

A long, long time ago, dragons ruled Elessad. They ruled a feudal Empire which kept humans and gryphons as slaves. Over time, decadence and political intrigue led to the downfall of their civilization and they were overthrown. They fled into the wilderness, growing feral as they lost the knowledge of their own history.

Many, *many* thousands of years later, humans finally arose as the dominant race on Elessad, building their own kingdoms with a mix of advanced technology and magic. Dragons were considered little more than nuisances at this time, and a cabal of mages with a grudge designed a curse targeted to kill entire bloodlines of dragons. Whenever a curse was cast, that dragon, and all of its descendants, would be killed near-instantaneously, drained of their lifeforce. This set off a war between humans and dragons, but the longer it went on, the more dragons died, and the human mages grew in power.

Then, calamity struck. Some say it was bad luck--more say it was the will of Saurii, the god of death. When Saurii learned that his favored race had nearly been eradicated from Elessad, he

cursed the humans in turn and set loose a magical plague across the human realm. This had serious repercussions for the humans, but as for the dragons, it gave them a chance to recover. By chance, a few dragons managed to save themselves by forming a bond with a human, allowing them to leech energy from their "host." Once done, it could not be undone. Eventually, an armistice was reached. The dragons were still reduced to well under a hundred survivors, but there were enough humans unwilling to let them go extinct that they were able to find a safe haven in Nyashu, the Dragon Keep--a huge, dragon-sized ruin of a castle located far from human habitation.

As the surviving dragons bred and hatched new dragons, the bloodline curse weakened somewhat, but not entirely. Dragon clutches were laid in the Keep and potential bonders were brought from across Elessad, wherever they could be found, in hopes of bonding the hatchlings, and over the course of a century, the dragon population grew, slowly but surely.

Finally, the first (known) contact with other worlds was established when a ship full of smuggling space pirates landed on Elessad and "rescued" (stole) a clutch of dragon eggs, among other things, which were distributed across the Nexus. Most of the eggs successfully hatched and bonded to a nearby sentient. When Elessad's government learned of the (relative) success of the offworld clutch, they were more than happy to offload more clutches to other worlds in the name of saving the species. With the opening of the Dragon Keep to offworld bonders, Elessad was officially introduced into the Nexus.