

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

# Gossamer Worlds: Dragonhearth



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

# Gossamer Worlds: Dragonhearth

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**Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall**



## Dragonhearth

*"The invisible staircase descended from the darkened void above, winding down in a lazy gyre which made me feel like a raptor circling prey. Eventually I alighted upon a landing before an open archway spilling over with warm orange light. The room beyond was small and circular, like the top of a tower, wrought in gleaming brass and lit by spigots of flame which protruded from the walls. The atmosphere felt like a sauna, or the inside of a boiling kettle, and a brush of my hand confirmed the burnished walls to be scalding hot. In the room was a single Door made of solid gold set with gemstones, its frame inlaid with twisting serpentine spines and its spiky golden knob worked in the shape of a snarling dragon's head."*

*- Yaeger's Travelogue*

### Description

Dragonhearth is a world of dragons.

I don't mean that Dragonhearth is a world in which you can find dragons, though you absolutely can. I don't mean that it is a place ruled by dragons, though it absolutely is. What I mean is that Dragonhearth is an entire world where the very fabric of gossamer reality *is* dragon-stuff, from the serpentine wavelengths of light propagating through space, to the myriad draconic life forms inhabiting the realm, to the ancient wyrms whose living



breath forms the clouds and whose bodies make up the very bedrock of the mountains. The entire realm is dragons, dragons, dragons, everywhere and in *everything*, and it is truly marvelous.

Also dangerous – did I mention exceedingly dangerous?

Life is abundant and aggressive in Dragonhearth. Much of the terrain is mountainous, with stony spires and daunting cliffs providing roosts and perches for the screeching, soaring multitudes of dragonkind. Towering forests fill the valleys between the highlands, and in the warmer regions there are dark jungles and sucking swamps teeming with exotic draconic





flora and fauna. There are extreme regions – icy wastes of flesh-freezing cold and volcano-fields sweltering in blood-boiling heat – but in a world where breathing blasts of the raw elements is as common as regular breathing, there's no shortage of perfectly-adapted beasts filling every ecological niche. Even the plants are vicious – I once almost got a finger bitten off by a lovely-smelling but too-literal snapdragon. Species roles tend overwhelmingly toward the predatory, with greater predators preying upon their lesser cousins all the way up the food chain; only the eldest of the ancient wyrms dare to boast the title of 'apex predator' in this savage land, and even the eldest have reason to fear the combined might of the younger dragons.

The struggle of young versus old is an eternal conflict in Dragonhearth. The eldest dragons have life spans measurable by epochs, so they have a terrifying capacity to soak up and hoard power over time. Every so often a cabal of middle-aged dragons tries to take out some of the older generation; in this you can see the influence of the Umbra, doing what entropy does by nudging crystalized accumulations of energy back toward dispersion and disorder. Every so often the usurpers win and the power of the elders disperses, but more often than not these generational coups fail catastrophically, resulting in massacres which only serve to widen the gap between the incumbent elder dragons and the next tier of would-be rivals.





Reincarnation is a fact of spiritual existence in Dragonhearth. Dragons have souls, and those souls respect a karmic hierarchy where meritorious living earns incarnation as a higher species of draconic creature in the next life. 'Meritorious living' in this context means being the best and strongest and most cunning dragon one can be, without any soft-skin nonsense about being kind or generous or forgiving people. The dragons believe their treasure hoards have spiritual value in these end-of-life karmic calculations, which explains their covetous tendencies and willingness to defend a giant pile of jewels even in the face of certain death. Through reincarnation a draconic soul might climb the rungs from a small feathered serpent to a wyvern, then to a majestic red dragon, only to tumble down to the level of a lowly fire-eel if their fortunes fail. A draconic soul may retain important memories or strong affinities from one life to the next, and it is not uncommon for a soul to keep the same friends and enemies from life to life.

Metamorphosis is a common biological characteristic of the dragons of Dragonhearth, so a draconic soul need not wait for death and rebirth in order to change. Some metamorphoses are gradual, with dragons changing incrementally during the process of molting their skins or during growth spurts following a gorging feast. Some metamorphoses are radical, like the caterpillar transforming into the butterfly, with the dragon entombing itself in a hard chrysalis or silky cocoon for anywhere from a month to millennia, then emerging with substantial upgrades. Metamorphosis can also be devolutionary, with dragons hibernating after a humiliating defeat only to crawl back out as something lesser than before.

All dragons belong to both the Eidolon and the Umbra, waxing and waning between stronger and weaker phases of affinity for either throughout the course of their existence. These shifts and phases usually coincide with the vicissitudes of





### Khemezatron

the draconic soul's cycle of metamorphosis and reincarnation; so while an acid-spewing drake might be chaotic and destructive in a waxing Umbra phase, in its next incarnation the influence of the Umbra wanes as the drake becomes a grumpy basilisk, eventually transforming into a disciplined crystal wurm in some later waxing-Eidolon phase. This constant churning between the two cosmic forces produces a great deal of magical friction, and is one of the reasons dragons are so mystically powerful. This ever-moving but roughly balanced juxtaposition of the Eidolon and Umbra has held for eons, and until quite recently Dragonhearth was a healthy example of cosmic balance.

Then came the machines.

A few years ago, the golden dragon Khemezatron – a Warden of the Grand Stair and explorer of the multiverse – returned home to Dragonhearth after a long sojourn, bringing with her a psychotechnic virus from an alien world where psychic communication had converged with computer science at the bleeding edge of nanotechnology. Hardly an innocent or unwitting carrier, Khemezatron returned with specific aims to conquer her homeland and her fellow dragons with the insidious aid of the alien virus. Nowadays, half-cyborg dragons infected with the psychotechnic virus are constantly on the prowl, seeking out other dragons to overpower and subject to infection and Khemezatron's mental control. The battle for the souls of Dragonhearth has begun.



## Dragonbonds

The dragonbond is an intense psychic, spiritual, and mystical connection between a dragon and any other living being – another dragon, a humanoid, or even some lesser creature. The two parties to a dragonbond are referred to as 'dragonmates', though only one of them need be a dragon. The emotional character of the relationship between dragonmates can vary greatly; a powerful dragon might loom as tyrannical master over a submissive thrall, a partnered pair of dragons may be soul-entwined lovers, or a dragon and its non-dragon companion may share an unbreakable bond of friendship and mutual respect.

The formation of a dragonbond is always a unique and personal story, varying wildly in the amount of time, effort, and contact required. Bonds can be formed through sleepless weeks of intense ritual and spiritual communion, or instantly as two souls reach out for each other as destiny intended. Some elder dragons possess psyches so powerful they can force the dragonbond upon any creature who meets their gaze.

Dragonbonds are tenacious and long-lasting. Breaking a bond is always difficult and traumatic, usually requiring a combination of psychic surgery and the use of a Power, such as a specific Sorcery ritual or creative use of Invocation to detangle the dragonmates' True Names. Death alone will not break a dragonbond,



and it *is* possible for a creature to remain bound to a corpse. It is not uncommon for dragonmates remain bonded through reincarnation and resurrection, twining together in an endless cycle of shared lifetimes.

Dragonbonds are either weak or strong. A creature may sustain multiple dragonbonds, both weak and strong, between multiple different dragonmates, though typically a creature's capacity for multiple bonds is a function of its age and power. Lesser creatures can hold only a single bond, whereas ancient dragons can hold entire ecosystems in their sway.

A weak dragonbond allows dragonmates to communicate empathically over short distances (typically no further than one mile), feeling each other's emotions and exchanging basic ideas such as 'attack', 'hunt', 'flee', 'help me', etc. Simple directions can be given and obeyed,



though each dragonmate ultimately retains its free will to choose its actions.

A strong dragonbond grants all the benefits of a weak bond, and also allows dragonmates to communicate telepathically, share senses and memories, and instinctively locate each other. If either dragonmate has the power to access the Grand Stair, both can sense and pursue each other across realities via *Attunement to the Grand Stair: Search Through Worlds*. Also, dragonmates with a strong bond can share Powers easily, with uses such as gaining simultaneous benefit from protective effects, casting Sorcery spells through each other, or joining their strength when invoking the Eidolon or Umbra. The intense connection of a strong dragonbond has its drawbacks. One dragonmate in a strong dragonbond can attempt to impose its will upon the other dragonmate by defeating it in a challenge of Psyche, giving suggestions the force of command. Also, dragonmates in a strong bond feel each other's mental and physical pain to some degree, though a creature may use its Endurance to endure such discomfort without being overwhelmed.

### Typical Denizens

There are a *lot* of dragons here, but by now that should be fairly obvious. The number of variations upon the draconic theme cannot easily be counted. There are faerie dragons, feathered serpents, and dragon turtles. There are wyverns,



sinuous wingless wyrms, and a prolific assortment of the classic four-legged, two-winged reptiles adorned with myriad assortments of horns, spines, and frills. There are elemental dragons whose bodies are roaring flame or crashing waves, and diffused draconic spirits who drift like ghosts or the blowing wind. Some dragons are labeled based upon the color or physical composition of their scales, but those simplistic and small-minded naming conventions hardly reach a sufficient depth of individual morphological nuance; that said, most people understand that when I yell 'red dragon!' they should run away from the big scary thing which is likely about to incinerate us with its fire breath, so the simple names have a tendency to stick.



In addition to the overwhelming preponderance of 'regular' dragons great and small, there are a number of humanoid draconic races. You could refer to them as 'dragon-men', but I wouldn't do so to their faces. To wit:

The Quetzali are a race of bipedal wingless feathered serpents with long wispy tails, willow-thin frames, and colorful frills of feathers which conceal their poisonous spines. Found around the stepped pyramids of Dragonhearth's warmer deserts and jungles, the shamanistic Quetzali are excellent psychics and sorcerers, adept with consciousness-altering venoms and dangerous dream-magic. They are masters of the dragonbond, and can create, strengthen, and sever such bonds through sacred psychic rites passed down and preserved since ancient times.

The Dracon have short-snouted draconic heads atop well-muscled humanoid bodies, with short vestigial tails. Lording over a small empire of medieval technology heavily augmented by spellcraft, the Dracon are proud and bellicose, quick to take offense or seize an advantage. While they have a nagging inferiority complex regarding their status beneath the 'true dragons' of Dragonhearth, they're not to be underestimated; Dracon enchanters equip their arcane knights with ensorcelled weapons and armor the rival of any dragon's scales or claws.



*Dracon*

If you visit Dragonhearth, you may also encounter a supposed race of fey-like dragon-kin who call themselves the Faelen Draga, appearing as comely men and maidens with brows kissed by scales and the glint of summer lightning in their teeth. They'll wine and dine you and promise you the secret heart of the kingdom after an evening's passion, but it's all a ruse and a trap. They're nothing but a gang of low-down shapeshifting faerie-dragons intent on robbing blind any gullible humanoid they can find. Charlatans. They're the worst. *Not that I'm bitter or anything.*

Scattered sparsely throughout Dragonhearth are a few non-draconic inhabitants, though all of them are non-natives, transplanted here from another gossamer world sometime in the recent or distant past. Some of these are refugees,



brought here pursuant an inter-dimensional exodus facilitated by a meddling Warden of the Grand Stair, like the tribes of blue elves who dwell in the city-trees of the equatorial jungles, or the isolated villages of humans left over from the ill-fated Fanfomir Expedition. Other non-natives are the minions – or the descendants of minions – of the various Gossamer Lords who have established holdings in the common ground of Dragonhearth over the ages, staffing various castles and fortresses while their masters galavant across the multiverse. Regardless of their origins, these non-natives have an additional challenge in that their non-dragon biologies are treated as unwelcome foreign bodies by the gossamer reality of Dragonhearth; this rejection manifests physically as various wasting diseases referred to generally as 'soft-skin sickness'. Non-natives afflicted with soft-skin sickness can abate the condition by making their bodies or souls more draconic – usually by forming a dragonbond with a native dragon, or by consuming a regular diet of fresh dragon blood. Thus, for the sake of survival (and because it is profoundly awesome), the sacred companionship of dragonbonds are an essential way of life for all the inhabitants of Dragonhearth.

## Threats

Dragons are dangerous. If you didn't know that already, you know it now. A



foolish Gossamer Lord or Lady might assume that just because dragons are commonplace in this gossamer world, the common dragon is therefore unremarkable in power and threat. That's a risky assumption. While it is true that the majority of the dragons in Dragonhearth are no real match for we high-and-mighty walkers of the Grand Stair, bear in mind that dragons are the very essence of this particular gossamer reality, and that inherent synergy can translate into a powerful home field advantage. Also, due to the unpredictable power-dynamics of reincarnation and karmic metamorphosis, draconic specimens who don't appear at first glance to be the top of food chain might nevertheless possess the





power and aptitude of countless lifetimes. So the small ember-drake perched on your shoulder might be the equivalent of a winged house cat, or it might be potent enough to melt your face off if you don't let it eat the rest of your lunch. Unless or until you've gotten to know an individual dragon and assess its power level, do yourself a favor and assume they're all caution-worthy.

Dracoliches are ancient elder dragons who possess such power they have transcended the constraints of mortality, returning to corporeal form in defiance of death time and again. Some dracoliches are undead in the classical necromantic

sense – serpentine corpses rising from their graves on skeletal wings wearing only tatters of rotten flesh. Others have attuned themselves to the elements so completely their spirits can reform their bodies from fiery lava or the bedrock of mountains. A few dracoliches reincorporate themselves through even stranger means, assembling new bodies from flesh-warped amalgams of their dragonbonded thralls, inhabiting golden simulacra wrought from their vast treasure hoards, or possessing an endless series of arcane clones grown to house their souls for perpetuity. Dracoliches draw upon both the Eidolon and the Umbra; they can sow madness and destruction, but they're also



domineering overlords and calculating empire-builders, unwilling to discard their well-established legacies and face the unthinkable prospect of starting anew... or ending. Over time dracoliches collect vast resources, including armies of dragonbonded minions held in thrall by the dracolich's overwhelming psyche. The only saving grace of these ancient wyrms may be their glacial patience, which permits them to sleep away centuries or even millennia in between relatively brief eruptions of activity. Only a few dracoliches stir in the present age; the rest lay dormant. There is terrible potential there, for if even a quarter of Dragonhearth's known dracoliches were roused at the same time, the catastrophes to ensue would surely be apocalyptic.

Khemezatron is an elder dragon who awakened to the existence of the Grand Stair centuries ago and, like so many of us did when presented with the possibilities of an infinite cosmos just beyond the nearest Door, stepped out of her home world to go exploring. When she left Dragonhearth, Khemezatron was already a powerful golden dragon who had mastered the Eidolon as well as the art of Invocation, but her otherworldly travels changed her. On a futuristic gossamer world where computer science and psychic communications are sides of the same coin, Khemezatron was infected by a psychotechnic virus. The virus transformed her into a being of enlightened psionic circuits – and a devastatingly effective disease vector.

## Deathless Dragons

Dracoliches come in many varieties, each individual a unique and terrifying beast unto itself, but most dracoliches have, at a minimum, the following qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points] – which may be suspended at the whim of the dracolich, should it wish to rest for a while in a death-like torpor.
- True Name is Warded [2 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – an individualized array of potent supernatural abilities, e.g. elemental summoning, necromancy, weather control, one or more of the Powers, etc.

Khemezatron has returned home to Dragonhearth as a messianic mother-conqueror, proselytizing to her fellow dragons that they shouldn't consider this a takeover, but an upgrade.

## Khemezatron, the Golden Circuit

### Attributes

Psyche – 65 Points

Strength – 45 Points



Endurance – 30 Points

Warfare – 25 Points

### **Powers**

*Eidolon Mastery* [50 Points]

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points]

*Invocation* [20 Points]

### **Artifacts & Creatures**

*Technobonded Army* [30 Points] – Khemezatron commands a diverse army of cybernetically-modified dragons whose dragonbonds have been replaced by Khemezatron's technobonds, rendering them her obedient slaves.

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Horde [x3 Points]

*Khemezatron's Golden Armor* [12 Points]

– this shape-shifting suit of golden armor is made of Khemezatron's own scales, bolstered by the strength of the Eidolon and inscribed with the True Names of several creatures or objects into which Khemezatron can transform. The armor has been thoroughly infested and altered by the psychotechnic virus which afflicts Khemezatron, and acts as an infection reservoir to ensure she does not reflexively rid herself of the virus.

- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Self Healing [1 Point]

- Named and Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points]
- Confers Named & Numbered Alternate Forms on Wearer [5 Points] - Seven alternate forms, including a human woman in a golden dress, a gold-plated android, a warhorse with golden barding, a water serpent bound in golden rings, and a black and gold 1982 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am.

*Draconis, Khemezatron's Ruby Horn* [7 Points] – the ruby horn protruding from Khemezatron's forehead is a powerful psychic amplifier and a focus for her Invocation-based ability to transform dragonbonds into technobonds.

- Connected to Invocation [1 Point]
- Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points]
- Confers Mold Gossamer Creatures on Wearer [5 Points] – if *Draconis* were to be destroyed, all of Khemezatron's technobonds would unravel and cease to exist.

### **Stuff**

*Bad* [+2 Points]

### **Technobonds vs Dragonbonds**

Khemezatron's mastery of the psychotechnic virus allows her to “hack” an existing dragonbond, severing (or at least suppressing) the bond between two dragonmates and inserting herself as one of the parties to the bond. To do so, the victim creature must be exposed to some source of the virus (physical contact with



an infected creature is sufficient) and Khemezatron must defeat the victim in psychic combat. If/once Khemezatron is successful, the victim's dragonbonds are all suppressed and replaced by a single 'technobond' binding the victim to Khemezatron as she hijacks the connection of the bond and redirects it to herself. The nature of every technobond is a controlling relationship between master and slave, and Khemezatron may impose her will on her technobonded minions with minimal effort. Khemezatron automatically learns the True Name of any creature she subjects to a technobond, granting her all the appurtenant benefits which come with such intimate and profound knowledge.

A technobonded creature acts robotically, experiencing episodes of confusion and fugue while its mind struggles against the psychotechnic virus. Victims get the shakes and display other physical symptoms of infection as their nervous systems are replaced by circuitry, with metallic contact nodes protruding from their skin and lattices of golden wires replacing their irises.

There is still a residual psychic connection between a technobonded creature and its former dragonmate(s) – a hollow channel filled with awful psychic static and echoing with pangs of loss. A technobonded creature can use this residual connection to attempt to subject its former dragonmates to the technobond via the same method of infection and



The Kur

psychic combat, and by this means the psychotechnic virus can propagate without Khemezatron's direct action, appropriating entire dragonbond networks as it spreads.

### Notable Locations

The Kur is an enormous mountain range which bisects the middle of Dragonhearth's largest central continent, running from north to south in a crest of stony spires and jagged peaks which can be spied in the distance all across the world. The Kur's thousand summits are





### *The Valley of Bones*

tall and nearly impossible to traverse on foot, broken up by dark chasms but also protected valleys filled with scaly pines and a wealth of draconic life. In addition to being an unmistakable landmark, Kur is also the largest, oldest, and most powerful dracolich in all the realm. Slumbering in the ground (as the ground) since before the eldest dragons cracked their shells, the ancient elemental dragon has not stirred in ages... though it does dream. Ghostly dream-projections created by Kur's godlike psyche haunt the mountain range, pantomiming echoes of ancient memories and silently watching the goings-on. Much like an elephant staring blankly in the direction of a gnat, Kur doesn't react to much, which is a good thing, since if it ever so much as shifted in

its sleep half of Dragonhearth would rip apart at the seams.

The Crystal Cliffs lay far to the northeast of the Kur, looming high above the icy coast of the Sea of Watatsumi's Tears. Thousands of alcoves large and small pock-mark the cliff's sheer vertical face along its expanse, most leading into a vast cave system which riddles the crystalline bedrock and up into the permafrost of the frozen plateau above. The golden dragon Khemezatron dwells here, surrounded by her army of technobonded dragons and cyborg minions. In addition to commanding the minds of its infected inhabitants, the psychotechnic virus has thoroughly transformed the environment as well,





### *Vigil*

turning multiple square miles of the geode-like interior of the cliffs into a massive psychic supercomputer. The entire area is overwhelmingly saturated by the Eidolon, giving Khemezatron a pronounced advantage when invoking the Eidolon against anyone foolish enough to challenge her in her lair.

The Valley of Bones is nestled in the lowlands to the west of the Kur, along a southerly-flowing river which empties into the nearby Daggermaw Fjords. The valley is strewn with the moldering skeletons of hundreds of dragons who fell in battle a century ago during an ill-fated attempt to defeat the mighty storm dragon Shen-lung. In addition to slaughtering every challenger, the spiteful Shen-lung defiled their corpses with a binding curse so the dragons' souls would forever languish in their bones. Tragically,

the dragonbonded companions of the cursed dragons are also unable to move on, so the valley is frequented by aging sidekicks – some draconic, some humanoid – forever pining over the remains of their fallen dragonmates. These mournful survivors have formed a small monastic village named Vigil in the skull of one of the larger skeletons, and the Door to Dragonhearth opens up here, into the common room of the village's tavern, where many a glass is raised to memories of winged friends.

### *Final Thoughts*

Dragonhearth is an amazing place, full of bold and majestic dragons who inspire awe and stoke the imagination simply by being. I love this place, and I urge you to visit and see if there's a toothy fire-breathing beast out there who wants to be



your soul mate – but don't enter into such ties lightly, for dragons are not the sort of creatures one can afford to spurn. It's too bad the realm is presently suffering from the unbalance of Khemezatron's invading

machine infection, but something tells me Dragonhearth won't be tolerating that for long before it brings out the big *big* guns.

~ *Yaeger Zane*

## Dragonhearth Domain Table

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<b>Technology Level:</b>	Medieval/Other (psychotechnic machine invasion)
<b>Magic Level:</b>	Commonplace
<b>Security:</b>	None
<b>Type:</b>	Common Ground [2 Points] (multiple simultaneous owners, but presently experiencing a power-grab by owner Khemezatron)
<b>Control:</b>	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to the territory of one's bonded dragons*)
<b>Influence on the Powers:</b>	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Easily Used
<b>Special*:</b>	<i>From Dragons, All Things Flow</i> – The bodies, energies, and influences of dragons are the essential building blocks of gossamer reality in this realm. In order for Gossamer Lords and Ladies to exercise control over a portion of the world as a Domain, that control must be exerted through one or more bonded dragons. The Powers of Eidolon Mastery, Umbra Mastery, and/or Sorcery are half as effective and take twice the effort and time when not channeled through a bonded dragon

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