



by
Mike Prero

Ah! What kid hasn't dreamed of dragons! And here I am, an adult (most would agree), and I still read of the flying beasties!

There are two distinct cultural traditions of dragons: the European dragon, from European folk traditions and ultimately related to Greek and Middle Eastern mythologies, and the Chinese dragon, with counterparts in Japan, Korea and other East Asian countries.

The two traditions may have evolved separately, but have influenced each other to a certain extent, particularly in recent centuries. The English word "dragon" derives from Greek word, meaning "serpent of huge size, water-snake".

The association of the serpent with a monstrous opponent overcome by a heroic deity has its roots in the mythology of the Ancient Near East. Humbaba, the fire-breathing dragon-fanged beast first described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is sometimes described as a dragon with Gilgamesh playing the part of dragon-slayer.

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A large red dragon is coiled around a traditional Chinese pagoda with multiple tiers and a pointed roof.

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Dragons and dragon motifs are featured in many works of modern literature, particularly within the fantasy genre, including Tolkien's *Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit*, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern*, and many others.

The popular role playing game system *Dungeons & Dragons* makes heavy use of dragons, and has served as inspiration for many other games' dragons. Though dragons usually serve as adversaries, they can be either good or evil, with their alignment being determined by their species. For example, a red dragon is evil and breathes fire.

Some creationists believe that dragons of mythology were actually dinosaurs, and that they died out with other creatures around the end of the ice age.

I haven't encountered many collectors who have Dragons as a category, although any collector of Chinese Restaurants certainly has them. I started collecting them a couple of years ago, and Chester Crill, CA, collects them. He had 672 as of April 2005.

The artwork itself ranges from simplistic to complex, realistic to cartoonish, but it's the subject matter, I think, that really draws the eye. Dragons are the stuff of legend. We've grown up with them in books and movies, stories and advertisements. You can see them as you wander around any local Chinatown. In that way, they're very similar to our fascination with dinosaurs.

Dinosaurs were real, of course, whereas dragons weren't, but in many ways, the latter just adds to their attraction. Dragons are more open to interpretation...and perhaps dreams.

