DRAGON STORYTELLER

Creatures at home in the air appear to defy gravity.

Whether floating on clouds, soaring through the sky or prowling across the land, dragons are especially powerful mythic creatures, found in tales and legends that date back thousands of years.

Even today, new stories are still being created.

Christopher Paolini, Author of Eragon:
The reason I wanted to use dragons in Eragon was simply because I loved reading about them in fantasy books and I thought it would make an interesting subject for a story. But then as I started writing, I realized that they actually make very interesting characters in and of themselves. It’s not just they’re big and scaly and beautiful or terrifying or whatever the case may be, it’s the fact that they also have very interesting personalities.

Dragons historically have always represented very strong forces in the human imagination. And one of the joys about writing about dragons and reading about them, I think, is sort of feeling that connection with the history of this mythology and also the knowledge that these creatures are very, very powerful and very, very old.

Dragons signify an enormous number of things to an enormous number of people. They have represented life, death, chaos, the beginning of the world, the end of the world and all those things are such potent subjects for storytellers, I think, people will continue to write and make movies about them for many years to come.

CONSTRUCTING DRAGONS

For centuries, human societies have constructed dragons using elements of animals from the natural world. Today, movie artists and animators also draw on natural sources to create something never seen before.

Glen McIntosh, Industrial Light & Magic:
The star of our movie is this gigantic blue dragon. So she’s a creature of fantasy, and how do we make the audience care about her but also make her look real.

Jean Bolte, Industrial Light & Magic:
It’s necessary to go to what is real, because that stuff is more bizarre than anything I can possibly imagine.

Ken Bryan, Industrial Light & Magic:
Nature’s a good guide because it gives you a starting place – you know that this can work, that this type of anatomy can work do to a certain task.

With Saphira, we looked to many, many sources. We left no stone unturned – we looked at reptiles, we looked at birds, we looked at insects.

Glen McIntosh:
And these are some examples of that, where we would look at newborn fawns and how hard it is for them to stand up. You can see in the animation reference how we’ve, as much as possible, followed the ungainly movements of the fawn, and incorporated them into Saphira as a character.

Jean Bolte:
In the beginning, one of my, one of my concept pictures had been a pangolin. And a pangolin is kind of like an anteater. And I was able to take high-res photos of these pangolin scales, incorporate them onto macaw feathers, so now she had these scaly, feathered wings, that we called “skeathers,” because they’re kind of a combination of scales and feathers.

Ken Bryan:
But one of the things I really liked about Saphira was this part of her body right through here where the wings connect. We didn’t have any examples in nature of how that might work. There aren’t any four-legged beasts with big birdlike wings sticking out of their back, so we had to come up some new ideas for anatomy.

Movie dragons, they have to do sometimes much more than anything in nature would have to do. They’re magic, dragons are magic.

**CHINESE PARADE DRAGONS**

While modern storytellers create new interpretations of dragons, for many cultures, the traditional notion of a dragon retains great significance. Asian dragons are powerful yet benevolent creatures that protect and bring good fortune.

The look and style of dragon dances in New Year’s parades is remarkably similar among ethnic Chinese communities worldwide.

Kah H. Phon, New York City:
To the Chinese, the dragon is a mythical creature, which signifies strength and longevity, and it’s supposed to drive away, you know, evil spirits.

Chia-Ying Chung, New York City:
It’s experiencing something from my childhood and much like, you know, we go to July 4th parades because it’s nostalgic. At the same time it’s reconnecting and being reminded of a part of my culture and a part of my own history.

Jerry Won, New York City:
When I go to the movies, I see a dragon such as *Eragon* where, you know, they’re winged. I think in Chinese culture the dragons are more like serpents. That’s the biggest difference that I notice between those two dragons. And I don’t really connect with European-style dragons. I connect more so with Asian dragons.

If you’re described as a dragon, that’s a very positive, you know, reference that the people are making.

**Kah H. Phon:**
I’ve seen dragon dances, you know, all through my life, and I’m quite familiar with that. The last time I saw it, when I was a child and now as an adult, the basic dance is still the same.

**Chia-Ying Chung:**
When I look at the dragons, when I look at the lions, I – not only do I get taken back to childhood, but I also think back to my past and, and realize that these things, these symbols are important to me. Whether I take them literally or not, they’re a part of who I am.