



FANTASTIC BEASTS OF CINEMA

#3 - DRAGONS



Unlike the final season of Game of Thrones, the dragons in the story were memorable, with their iconic moments and significance.

Arguably the single most common mythological creature found in fantasy fiction, dragons are mostly kept by the powerful or promising characters in a story, and are pivotal for their capability to win in the end. Hence, finding, raising, training, and defeating dragons is a wishful plot in movies and games alike.

The theories around the origin of dragons are abundant, from fossils to spirituality.



The compelling ubiquity of dragons in stories from ancient civilisations paved their way into films. The ancient world was hardly as connected as the modern world. How do we explain their origin in various parts of the world that probably did not interact with each other?

It is theorised that the earliest humans in civilisations discovered fossils, saw a glimpse of, or heard from someone else the description of a gargantuan animal. It was a time when even heavy rain was attributed to the anger of Gods. Larger-than-life stories were spun around the sinister nature of these beasts.



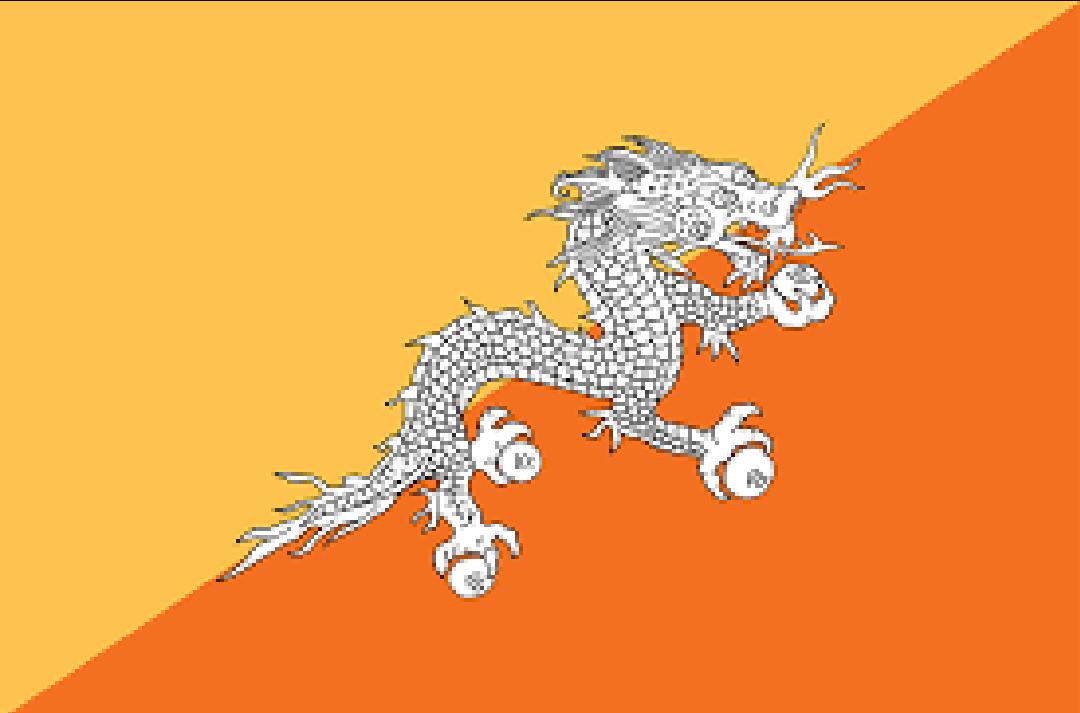
For centuries, whales were one of the least understood animals on Earth, as they were large fearsome creatures of the sea that were difficult to observe or hunt. The myths of aquatic dragons came about due to whales, and even the Nile crocodile - another giant ferocious marine animal that's hostile to humans.

Other theories state that dinosaur fossils inspired the idea of powerful animals who could breathe fire, fly, and even grant wishes to humans. In the past, finding fossils was more frequent than today, and humans often did not have the background to understand them.

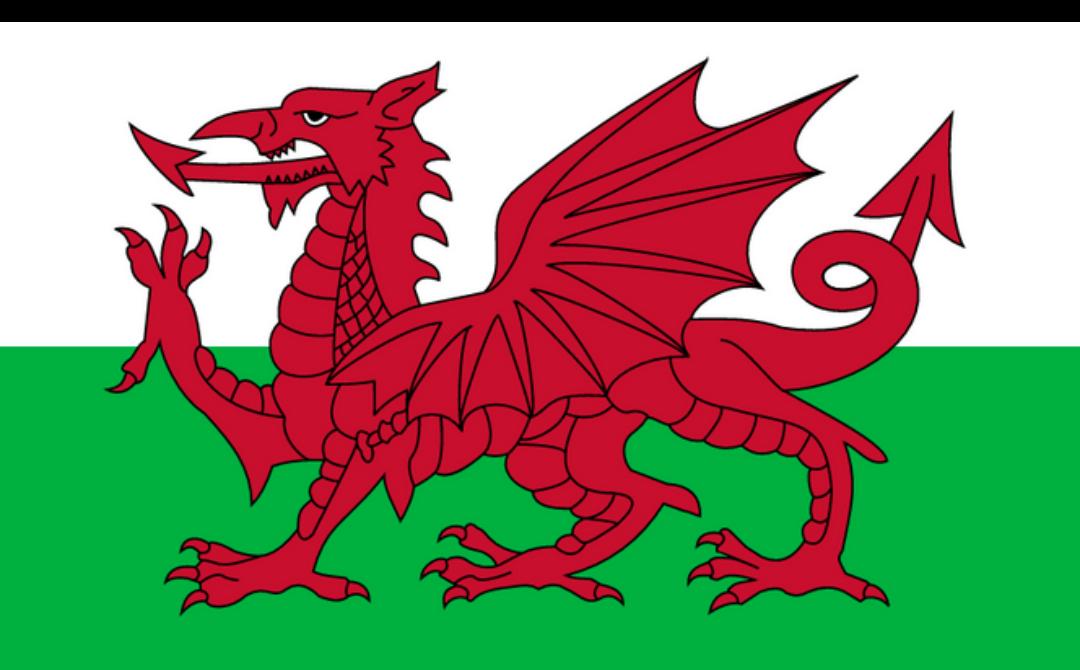


China has the oldest tradition of dragon stories, dating back more than 5,000 years. In Chinese imagery, dragons represent aristocratic imperial rule, power, and good fortune. Dragon robes were worn exclusively by the noble class people of China.

The dragons of Chinese myths dwelled in distant waters. Although usually they were wingless, they could fly. With control of the weather, they brought the rain, and hence the fruits of the soil. In the 12-year Chinese zodiac, dragon years are the most auspicious.



China's neighbour, Bhutan, has numerous beliefs around dragons. Coined "Land of the Thunder Dragon", the thundering sounds of storms were believed to be made by dragons in the sky. It is believed by some that since Bhutan holds dragons sacred, they are blessed with resources, wealth, and happiness. Bhutanese people hence also conserve their environment judiciously, and are consistently analysed to be one of the happiest populations in the world.



The fascination of dinosaur fossils encouraged stories and beliefs around dragons in Wales as well, which is on an entirely different continent.



From early mentions in Star Wars and King Arthur's adventures in Dragonheart, the dragon has played a significant role in numerous movies across decades.

Smaug, an antagonist dragon from Lord Of The Rings, is shown to be a shrewd and cunning dragon with an unfathomable desire for gold. Smaug was inspired from stories in Norse mythology, and could deceive his victims with elaborate bluffs.

Marvel took its dig at the dragon with the Fire Dragon in Thor Ragnarok.



As the fandom expands to more target audiences, the adaptations and characteristics of dragons have also been modified to fit the stories. Friendlier dragons appear in many stories nowadays, that captivate the attention of younger audiences.

Some of these dragons are neither shown to be malignant, nor holders of a powerful secret or treasure. They are simply shown as animals that have a certain sense of gregariousness.

Toothless from the How To Train Your Dragon series has won hearts worldwide.



From cheery children's cartoons to fascinating festivals, dragons have found a place in our conversations, faiths, stories, and films. They are a testament to the collective imagination of mankind, and how our heroes and villains can often have the same characteristics, regardless of which country or continent we hail from.

We are curious to see how cinema of the future will address this creature. Whether dragons are shown as companions to man or antagonists, they have the capability to singlehandedly decide the course of a story.