

Dragon: An Instinct for Dragons

Contributed by chaitea
Sunday, 22 July 2007

Article by chaitea.

This was originally a paper I wrote for my college psychology class. The Foolish professor actually gave us allowed us to choose what ever topic we wanted, so long as it dealt with psychology.

I first found out about Dr. David E. Jones from a History channel documentary on dragons. Though his theory contradicts a lot of my own beliefs, I can't help but find it fascinating nonetheless.

There are many questions as to why the dragon remains a constant symbol for mankind. The speculation that they were actually real is still controversial, though exceedingly put down by scientific research. Yet there are still many who hypothesize other theories as to why the dragon resides even in the most isolated of areas. One theorist, Dr. David E. Jones, anthropology, Univ. of Central Florida, has his own hypothesis based on dragons and the collective unconscious. He believes that dragons are a direct result of the evolutionary process.

In his book, *An Instinct for Dragons*, Jones explains that the idea of a dragon is hardwired into our brains. "Over millennia," he writes, "the raptor, big cat, and serpent began to form as a single construct--the dragon--in the brain/mind of our ancient primate ancestors." Dr. Jones first obtained his idea from the behavior of vervet monkeys in Africa. They have three different alarm calls that provoke three different defensive responses: one for the leopard, one for the martial eagle and one for the python. Dr. Jones felt that these three predators made up the idea of a dragon as a means of survival. This may help explain why every culture, no matter how isolated, has a dragon legend. The editors of *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN* write: "Most of the 40 illustrations in the book portray dragons as different societies envisioned them. The common theme is that they look scary."

Though a bold statement, Dr. Jones's idea does bring about a certain amount of thought. These three creatures spoken of, the serpent, big cats, and bird of prey, all compose the image of a dragon when combined. Not only in appearance, yet even the challenge they had once presented mankind also rivals that of the influence that the dragon has had upon us. They were the prehistoric man's rivals and largest competition. This can be drawn back into the nature that dragons seem to have. They are either a challenge to overcome or a great force to be reckoned with.

The varying appearance of dragons is based on the culture which perceives them. Although they may look different, yet a dragon can be viewed in almost any culture, no matter how isolated. The three main predators also have different appearance depending on the location they are in. These changes are what may give us the dissimilar manifestations of dragons in separate civilizations.

Through the differences in culture, beliefs, and traditions, dragons have stood out in our minds as a human race. Whether they lurk in our imaginations or represent our greatest fears; they have always been a part of our lives since the earliest civilizations to the present. Dragons have influenced us in so many ways of the centuries that it is almost impossible to speculate upon a life without these fabulous creatures. They assisted in linking humanity in its most isolated societies to a universal idea shared among one species.

Dr. Jones, David. *An Instinct for Dragons*. New York: Union Square, 2004