

## Ogres

An ogre (feminine: ogress) is a large and hideous humanoid monster, a mythical creature often found in fairy tales and folklore. While commonly depicted as an unintelligent and clumsy enemy, it is dangerous in that it feeds on its human victims. The idea of the ogre has been used as a method of instilling good behaviour in children by suggesting that bad behaviour attracted and excited ogres, who would then attack, kidnap, or even eat the perpetrator. Some authors, however, choose to show ogres in a somewhat brighter light, saying they are both shy and reclusive. Today, variants of ogres can be found in modern fantasy popular culture, such as in video and role-playing games, as well as in popular fiction.

A school of thought suggests that, like trolls, ogres originated in knowledge, if not memories, of Neanderthal humans. Whatever their origin, ogres represent that which is somewhat peculiar and different, and thus potentially dangerous, yet there is no denying their similarity to humans. The appearance of ogres in literature, art, and other cultural forms may reflect the desire to embrace, yet at the same time the fear of, those who are different. In more recent times, the image of the ogre has become less threatening, indicating humanity's growing ability to accept and reconcile with those previously feared on account of their differences.

### Description

Ogres are often characterized by their large, often disproportionate features: Depending upon the culture, ogres can be several times the size of a human being, or only a few feet taller. They are usually solidly built, with rounded heads, a large stomach and abundant and hirsute hair and beard. They often have large mouths full of prominent teeth, are distinguishable for their ugliness, and are accompanied by a horrific smell. Their skin is said to be rough and a dull earth-tone in Europe, while in Asia their skin can sometimes be a vibrant red or orange.

The Japanese oni are usually portrayed as hideous, gigantic creatures with sharp claws, wild hair, and two long horns growing from their heads. Occasionally, they are shown with unnatural features, such as odd numbers of eyes or extra fingers and toes. Their skin may be any number of colors, but blue, black, purple, pink, brown, green, white, and especially red, are particularly common. Their fierce appearance is only enhanced by the tiger-skin loincloths they tend to wear and the iron clubs they favor, called kanabō (金棒). This image leads to the expression "oni with an iron club" (鬼に金棒 oni-ni-kanabō), that is, to be invincible, or "strong beyond strong," having one's natural quality enhanced.

## Ogres in various cultures

According to the folklore and mythology of the peoples of Northern Europe, ogres live in the far corners of forests and mountains, sometimes even in castles. They are almost always incredibly large and stupid, being easily out-witted by humans. They are not always malicious; while there are stories of ogres that kidnap and eat children, terrorize villages, and even guard hordes of treasures or mystical secrets, they are sometimes considered merely shy and reclusive.

Certain Asian cultures have stories with creatures resembling ogres. Many Japanese fairy tales inspired by mythology and religion include the oni, a creature popularly associated with the ogre. Momotaro ("Peach Boy"), is one example, including the appearance of blue, red, and yellow oni with horns and iron clubs. Some villages hold yearly ceremonies to drive away oni, particularly at the beginning of spring. During the spring Setsubun festival, people throw soybeans outside their homes and shout "Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!" ("Demons out! Luck in!" "鬼は外！福は内！"). In more recent times, oni have lost some of their original wickedness and sometimes take on a more protective function. Men in oni costumes often lead Japanese parades to ward off any bad luck.

Ogres also appear in tribal cultures. Pygmy mythology includes the tale of Nagoogunogumbar, an ogre who devours children. Many Ogre-like creatures are also found in Native American tribal traditions and are usually in the form of man-eating giants. They are often linked to legends of bigfoot.