# Why & How I Began Writing About Dragons

by Christopher Paolini

On my 10th birthday, my grandmother gave me a copy of JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit.* It was a marvelous book filled with Michael Hague's paintings of hobbits, dwarves, elves, and most especially, the huge red dragon, Smaug. I loved the images of Smaug so much that I copied them over and over again—especially one of him lounging in his treasure room.

After that, I couldn't get enough of dragons! I went to my local public library and checked out other fantasy novels: the Dragonriders of Pern series by Anne McCaffery, the Pit Dragon trilogy by Jane Yolen, the Wizard of Earthsea trilogy by Ursula K. Le Guin, *Magician* by Raymond Feist, and many others. Often, when I should have been doing my math homework, my mind would drift away, and I found myself imagining what it would be like to soar on dragon-back, dodging through towering clouds.

One day I found the book *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher,* by Bruce Coville. It tells the story of a young man who buys a "stone" that ends up hatching a dragon. I liked the idea so much that I couldn't get it out of my head. So I asked myself four questions: What sort of land would a dragon egg come from? Who might find the egg in the middle of a wilderness? How did the egg get there? And—since dragon eggs can't be common—who *else* would be looking for it? Just trying to answer those four questions led me to create the entire world and story of *Eragon,* along with the rest of the Inheritance Cycle.

But then I had to figure out what kind of dragon to write about. Myths and legends describe many different types, so I had lots of ideas to choose from. In Europe, they are usually four-legged winged beasts that bring doom, death, and disease (though they tend to love riddles, which I also enjoy). In Asia, they are more snake-like, and they're often revered for their wisdom, as well as their links to nature, divinity, and (as in China) the Emperor. And of course, there are thousands of different versions in fantasy novels!

I took a deep breath, reminded myself that dragons don't actually exist (which is good, for if they did, they might eat us like popcorn!), and that I was free to depict them however I wanted.

To start with, I gave Saphira—my first dragon character—brilliant sapphire-blue scales, which refract the light like gems. Wouldn't it be stunning to see her sparkling in the morning sky? And I decided that instead of an evil dragon, she would be loyal, funny, brave, smart, fiercely independent, and born knowing some of the ancient wisdom of her race. She would be ferocious enough to eat Eragon's enemies, but gentle enough to cover him with her wing while he sleeps.

Saphira became such an interesting character that in my third book, *Brisingr,* I challenged myself to write from her point of view, to let readers see the world through the mind of a dragon. Though not an easy task, crafting that section helped me understand her even better. I hope you enjoy getting to know Saphira as much as I enjoyed creating her!