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Romancing the Ruby

July 27th, 2017 | Stephanie Dore

From Dorothy's magical slippers—created with 4,600 authentic gems—to the British crown jewels, rubies are made for storytelling.

This richly hued gemstone has been the subject of international escapades, royal woes, and superstition. Second only to diamond in value, and sometimes even surpassing it, what exactly is it about July's ruby birthstone that gives it such mythical appeal?

Ruby is very rare, and the most valuable gem in the corundum family, which includes sapphire. The more transparent—and less cloudy—the more valuable, though most rubies do have natural inclusions.

It is also very hard and scratch resistant. In fact, it can only be scratched by diamond, making it is a great option for everyday wear and an excellent choice for a gemstone engagement ring.

A colorless gemstone in its purest form, corundum takes on the color of trace elements in the ground it is exposed to as it develops. Unlike sapphires, which are found in almost every color of the rainbow, rubies get their color from the element chromium and are only red. If that red isn't red enough, the gem is considered a pink sapphire.

Ancient Hindus believed that offerings of ruby to the god Krishna would guarantee rebirth as an emperor, while Burmese warriors would insert the gems beneath their skin in hopes of invincibility.

The unsurpassed beauty of this "king of gems," as it's Sanskrit name "ratnaraj" means, has made its mark through many a museum and auction house as well. In 2015, the 25.29-carat Sunrise Ruby set an auction house record when it sold for more than \$1 million per carat, its extraordinarily fine color, purity, and well-balanced cut a true rarity.

An oval-cut ruby accented by a glittering diamond halo makes a show-stopping engagement ring and intense symbol of romance and passion. There are also beautiful ruby and diamond wedding bands that you can mix and match to your heart's content. And for those with a July birthday, ruby birthstone jewelry makes an incomparable gift.