



Great Dragon

On Dodge Street

By Kristina Nesteby

We've run a dining column in nearly every issue of *365ink* since February 2010 when the late, great Rich Belmont ran his first column featuring Mario's. It's the only one that received a rating (three out of four cheeseburgers). That's nearly 375 issues ago! Some are revisits, some are retired, but you can bet your belly that between Rich, Bryce, Danny, Sunil, and I, we've covered a lot of ground.

And yet, we've still missed some of those staple restaurants in the Tri-States. For me, it's Great Dragon—specifically the one on Dodge Street by Target. The buffet is long gone (thanks COVID), but the heaping portions of food are still omnipresent.

We've been fans of Great Dragon for years. In fact, they always remember to bring me hot oil without me having to ask, even if it's been months since I've been in! If I'm looking for a pile of food—plenty for leftovers or for sharing—or a no-frills restaurant to kick back and enjoy a meal, I'm heading to Warren Plaza.

At the top of our list is the black pepper chicken. Prepare yourself for a massive mound of chicken, green bell peppers, and onion. They have this special way of making the chicken kinda crispy. Like, is that some kind of cornstarch magic? Crispy chicken that's not breaded or battered? And the salty, savory, slightly sweet sauce (say that five times fast) is best sopped up with a big helping of rice. I'm not a fan of the hunks of peppers and think, at the very least, they could chop 'em up into smaller bits, but maybe that's just me. If anything, they're easier to pick out this way.

Moving on: The ragoons. Listen. I compared three ragoons back in 2019 and promised more comparisons would follow, and now it's 2024, and it's still a "to do" on my list. Great Dragon's ragoons were on that list, and here are some things that still hold true today:

"Great Dragon's crabmeat ragoons are simple and sweet. They have a smaller, thinner wonton wrapper that doesn't shatter although they do feel



(LEFT) BLACK PEPPER CHICKEN WITH CHICAGO-STYLE FRIED RICE AND (ABOVE) EGG ROLL

fragile compared to their counterparts. They're kind of the Lay's chip of the rangoon world while most are thicker like Ruffles. The filling is very smooth and makes you wonder if there's even any crab inside, but something about its simplicity has me going back for seconds."

You can opt for rangoons instead of an eggroll if you order a lunch or dinner special, but I opted for an eggroll on my most recent visit. There's nothing too crazy or innovative here, just fried, crispy, cabbagey goodness.

And the secret sauce? Chicago-style fried rice. I'm not into gatekeeping food-stuffs, but I'm not on the TikTok, and it's not like I'm Keith Lee, so, maybe, let's just all enjoy this together. Great Dragon's Chicago-style fried rice is dark, salty, and savory. I'm not always going to order it, but it's going to be subbed in most of the time.

"But what about all the other things on the menu?" I hear you cry. We shan't forget about them. Since the buffet is gone, it's a bit more difficult to try new things in the sense that I used to be able to grab a couple of pieces of broccoli from the chicken and veggies and a mushroom from the garlic chicken to go with my lil pile of mei fun and lifetime supply of green beans, but now I'm resigned to pints, quarts, or meals. And that's a lot of food; even the lunch portion could feed two hungry college kids or three to four Kristinas.

On the noodle side, I love mei fun. It's made up of these super thin rice noodles with various veggies and meat (if you order it that way) mixed in. They're light, bouncy, and slightly salty—perfect for soaking up the sauces from your entree.

If you ask my brother, the general's chicken is the way to go. Hunks of deep fried chicken are coated in a luscious slightly-sweet and savory sauce. It's not spicy to me, but the added hot oil can kick it up a notch.

The kung po chicken and vegetable lo mein also get added to my plate when the opportunity arises, and I'll even add a cup of soup if the moment is right. With a free cup of tea in hand, I'm always full and feel well taken care of at Great Dragon.

"Cheap Chinese" is easy to come by. And by that, I mean affordable Chinese food, regardless of the quality. But the two, quality and affordability, don't always intersect. Great Dragon offers both in addition to fast service; a large menu that covers the typical Chinese-American spread; and the option to order lunch and dinner specials (meals) in addition to à la carte pint and quart entrées.

If you haven't tried Great Dragon out, I encourage you to do so. Maybe on your next Target run or on a night when you feel like gobbling down a plate of salty goodness. Give 'em a try, and let them know *365ink* sent ya! ■

Great Dragon
3500 DODGE ST SUITE 125, DUBUQUE, IA
563-583-8860
Hours: Wed-Mon: 11 AM-9 PM; Tue: Closed

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