

Japanese Mythology

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Entertainment

Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of
episode outline)

Let's start with a quick update on last week's episode. That was one of my favorite shows we've ever done, I'll be honest. I think maybe we had TOO much fun and went a little off the rails and it kinda turned into a marathon, there was just so much information to cover in addition to our rambling, which is why it ended up being like an hour and a half. It was another case of me biting off much more than I could chew, trying to explore the entire future of artificial intelligence in 90 minutes, so there were bound to be some omissions, and one area we didn't delve into was music. We did mention that creative jobs were probably safe in the short-term, including musician, comedian, novel writer etc. Well you might be able to scratch one of those off the safe list already. A very catchy song called "Heart on my Sleeve" went viral last week featuring the voices of Drake and the Weekend, it was a big deal

and as far as we know it was the swaggy pope of music...this was an AI creation. It was uploaded by someone called ghostwriter977.

Now it seems like in this case it was just the voices that were fake, the song was most likely professionally produced using samples and the lyrics and melody were crafted by humans, but at this point we just don't know—maybe it was the first fully AI banger...all we know for sure is that Drake and the Weekend had nothing to do with it. I'll go ahead and play a sample. I got to be honest, I don't really know if this sounds like Drake. I don't listen to Drake. Or the weekend. They're just not my thing. But I kind of like this song. It sounds like a song that would be on the radio. There was another song that also went viral and very convincingly sounds like the British band Oasis. So the robots are coming for your Spotify playlist, and there's no legal framework in place to stop this. The record company does not own Drake's voice, so in order to get a song taken down Drake himself would have to pursue legal action and it's not clear that he would even have a case...so far, legal precedent seems to indicate that voices cannot be copyrighted, though that may change as a result of these new tools. I don't even know how you would go about doing that, a lot of people sound similar...how do

you protect a specific tone of voice, or way of speaking? How are you going to prove that someone is stealing your vocal style: what if I just happen to sound a heck of a lot like someone else? Can you sue anyone who imitates you? And in another episode we talked about cadence...how tone isn't the only aspect that makes your voice unique. Can you copyright your flow? That's something rappers have never tried. I guess we'll find out. And this one hits pretty close to home—what about my voice, or your voice? We both profit from our voices, so this is potentially going to affect us directly. It's a scary time. Now in this case the song did get taken down because it included a brief sample of a copyrighted audio file, but the record companies are only delaying the inevitable legal battle. Pandora's music box has been pried open and we're gonna be reckoning with audio deepfakes for the next few years at least. I'm going to include a quick example of how this can work...if you recall, last time I played you an audio track from Snoop Dogg, I have to come clean, that was not actually Snoop Dogg. I bamboozled you. But that same technology can be used really easily for rap music, which is basically just spoken word. (Play example) So that's a huge mess.

Also, in that episode I expressed my

concerns about criminals—or maybe even racists or homophobes or just massive jerks—using the existence of AI generated videos as get-out-of-jail free cards... there will soon be plausible deniability for anything you get caught doing or saying on video. We mentioned the Shaggy defense: it wasn't me. Well, welcome to the future, because in a currently unfolding lawsuit, Elon Musk's lawyers tried to claim that anything he has said or will say on video or in an audio file should be inadmissible in court because deepfakes.

I'm not going to get into the weeds on the case itself, but this particular legal maneuver represents a watershed moment; there is video online that was taken during the Q&A portion of a Vox Recode conference, in which Elongated Muskrat said, "A Model S and Model X at this point can drive autonomously with greater safety than a person, right now," which would be some blatantly dangerous bullshit even now, but was even more ridiculous back in 2016. Musk claims that he doesn't remember saying this—you would think the video and all of the witnesses might be able to jog his memory—but his lawyers are now claiming that he is not responsible for literally anything he has ever said or will say because any of it could be generated by AI. Now I concede that their point will

be valid sometime in the future, but we are not there yet, and the argument certainly doesn't apply to a time from before deepfakes were even convincingly achievable, this is video from seven years ago of an interview that was witnessed by an audience plus journalists and was quoted at the time in multiple media outlets. The judge in the case was justifiably alarmed by this tactic, to put it mildly. "In other words, Mr. Musk, and others in his position, can simply say whatever they like in the public domain, then hide behind the potential for their recorded statements being a deepfake to avoid taking ownership of what they did actually say and do." And the lawyers were like, "Yeah. That's what we're going with. I'm sorry, did you think we had scruples? We're lawyers. We don't even know what a scruple looks like. We get paid either way." Can you have only one scruple? They always seem to come in multiples, like a variety pack. Can you be like, "I never eat even a single grape at the supermarket fruit aisle before I buy them, because that would be theft. That is my one scruple. I have however murdered quite a few people." So anyway, that's where we're headed, folks. We're already running into some of the thornier aspects of this technology, less than two weeks after releasing an episode in which I strongly indicated that we had more

time. So it'll be really interesting to keep track of our predictions and how quickly they come true, if at all, I'm sure some won't. But so far I'm feeling pretty good about our batting average, it just seems like the world is going to be falling apart much faster than we anticipated. And btw for anyone who hasn't checked that episode out—maybe you're not really into technology—not only was it a super entertaining 90 minutes, you might find that it's soon going to be relevant to your life regardless of whether or not you are enthusiastic about the subject. Pretty much regardless of what you do for work you should be worried about your job, and we covered a lot of the careers that will be quickly joining the dinosaurs in historical oblivion. Spoiler alert: if you are a paralegal or Uber driver, update your LinkedIn.

So on to this week's show. I feel like the topic for this episode was kind of karma. Not that I'm unhappy about doing it, it was really interesting to research, but it was a little bit of a harsh wake up call. After a couple weeks of having fun hijacking the show and doing two episodes just because I wanted to—two episodes that no one asked for...this was like that meme again, it's like "nobody" "crickets" and then Shane: two episode on robots), but I got to have my fun and then I

put up a new poll with some potential topics, a few of which I was very excited to look into, and the Discord went and chose the only one that I was not. The one that I know fuck all about. After two episodes covering a subject about which I had read multiple books, the Discord community was like back to reality bitch, start from scratch.

The topic today is Japanese mythology. And I did grow up somewhat immersed in Japanese culture, my best friend from when I was five years old is Japanese so I was eating sushi as a kid and saying Itadakimasu before meals, I played with Kinikuman toys and tomo actually lived right across from Japan town, so we would hang out in Japanese bookstore is reading manga, but I've never been to Japan and I didn't get super into Japanese culture as I got older, I'm not a huge anime guy. So this stuff was really interesting to learn and I'm super glad that we ended up doing this episode. It made me wanna go to Japan, Tomo visits his mom pretty frequently and I need to see if he'll let me tag along next time.

There are two major religions in Japan, both of which, it has been argued, are not in fact religions. Do you know what they are? These are Buddhism and Shintoism, and I

think it's fair to question whether Buddhism—which was originally introduced to Japan via Korea—is more of a philosophy and a practice than a religion, but Shintoism has plenty of mystical elements. It doesn't conform exactly to what we think of as a religion, especially when compared to the big three: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. But it has a creation myth, it has supernatural elements, it's definitely a religion. Shintoism is older than Japan's recorded history...It comes from a time before the Japanese had written language. Which surprisingly wasn't all that long ago. Writing had existed in China and of course Sumeria for thousands of years before it made its way to Japan. So there's no way of knowing the origin date of those first foundational Shinto myths, they were passed down most likely for thousands of years via oral tradition. And we'll get to them soon.

As I have mentioned and been called out for on this podcast, I don't subscribe to any religion and I'm not particularly a fan of any religion, but if you forced me to choose one, especially if this was a religion that I had to be raised with, I don't think there would be any contest. Shinto is kind of the best of all worlds. There is no scripture, no primary text. There's no specific

doctrine, no explicit list of rules. There are really no sins, per se, but there are actions that can contribute to spiritual uncleanness, these impurities are known as Kegare and must be cleansed to attain a state of purity, or Kiyome. There was no founder of Shinto, there's no centralized authority, no pope or high Imam, and there is no prescribed process for conversion. It is harder to summon Beetlejuice than to become a follower of Shinto. You could just say it once, I follow Shinto. Boom. You're a...Shintoist? Shintoizer? This is not an evangelical religion, no one is trying to convert you to Shintoism. But if they were, I might consider it. There are just so many positive aspects, and so few negative ones at least in the modern era. This is a religion based heavily on gratitude and appreciation of the natural world.

Shinto is Animistic, meaning that in Shintoism pretty much every natural feature of the world has a spirit, these are known as Kami, and they're the closest thing that Shintoism has to gods. Shintoism is often described as polytheistic because there are so many Kami, but it's all very nebulous, Kami aren't really gods in our traditional sense... They don't spend their time constantly watching humans and judging them and moving us around like chess pieces. So God definitely

isn't the right word but maybe deity? Kami can be the ghosts of venerated ancestors but can also be inanimate objects or forces of nature, like lightning. They're neither evil nor good but rather a combination of both, they can be flawed just like living beings and yet are revered as sacred; many emperors were considered living Kami (known as Ikigami) while on earth, while others became Kami in the afterlife. Kami can die, which is interesting, and when they die they decompose. Typically the Kami are considered to inhabit a sort of shadow world, almost like another dimension that mirrors our own but is invisible to us except for brief glimpses through the veil. The other dimension or complementary world inhabited by the Kami is known as Shinkai. And there's no limit to the number of Kamis...a common saying is that there are 8 million Kami, yaoyorozu-no-kamigami, but 8 million is a number in Japan that was often used in postiquity to illustrate that an amount is actually limitless. Apparently there was a time when 8 million was the most anyone in Japan could imagine. 8 Million and one was mind blowing. Kami can be anywhere: Mountains and volcanos have a kami, Rivers and trees etc, and as a result, adherents to Shinto have a reverence for nature because of the sentient energy that they believe is

attached to every element of the world. In some ways you can see how the American new-age and counterculture movements have been influenced by this type of philosophy, although Shintoism prizes cleanliness and would not appreciate dirty hippies. You might know that the Japanese are famously obsessed with bathing, with bath houses and cleanliness and hygiene. This is why you remove your shoes before entering a house. Similarly, you must be purified by water before entering one of the many public shrines in Japan, over 100,000 of them, where Kami are acknowledged and revered...worshipped wouldn't be the right word. You've no doubt seen the Torii, the distinctive gate with two posts and two crossbars, the top one is typically curved upwards. The Torii symbolizes the barrier between the two worlds. Shinto holds that humans are innately good, but we are influenced by evil spirits and Kami, which is why many houses in Japan also feature their own small shrine called a Kami-dana year include charms and gifts for the spirits. There are around 80,000 Shinto priests in Japan, but Shinto priests and priestesses are not like monks or priests in the west, women can be Shinto priests, and they can marry and have kids, and they don't preach or sermonize.

So while there are mystical and mythological traditions in classical Shintoism, I think it would be fair to say that the modern version is more of a lifestyle and worldview than a religion. When we think of the stereotypes of Japanese culture, we probably imagine elements like respect, graciousness, politeness, reverence. And Shintoism is really at the heart of many of the qualities that foreigners tend to associate with Japan.

On a personal note, as a guy with legit diagnosed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, I love this religion so much. Cleanliness, order, organization, attention to detail. These are my love languages. To be fair, Shinto kind of feels more like a nagging parent than a religion. Clean your goddamn room! Do your laundry and take a shower! Wash your ass! There's a great example of a Shinto aesthetic that we're all familiar with, we've all seen Japanese tea Gardens, the way that they are so pristine and perfectly manicured...there is something incredibly appealing to me about the orderliness of Shintoism. And not just that of course, there are in fact four core values in Shinto, known as affirmations, and I can get behind pretty much all of them.

The four affirmations

One: Family. The family unit is the foundation for instilling traditional values. There is a certain conservatism in Shinto, which is not always my favorite thing but I do find this version somewhat appealing. Spend time with your parents, insomniacs, they won't be around forever.

Two: Nature. Reverence for and appreciation of the natural world.

Three. Purity. As we've covered exhaustingly, Bathing and cleansing are central to the Shinto beliefs system, in order to cleanse yourself from Kegare (cay-gar-A). This can take the form of putting salt on your shoulders, cleansing with water, cleaning the stoop of the house. Kami are basically everywhere, right, so it's very important to keep everything clean, because there's a Kami who lives in mirrors, and if you have a dirty mirror you're disrespecting someone's house. Sumo wrestlers will throw salt before a match, and before you enter any Shinto shrine you have to cleanse yourself via the ritual called Chozuya or Temizu...Typically you will pour a ladle of water on each of your hands, left first, then right, and then fill your left hand with water and use that to cleanse your mouth as well. Kami are sensitive to funky

breath, I guess. Makes me a little nervous to enter the shrine, honestly, I don't know how intimate it's going to get. "The Kami wants you to cleanse your anus, don't ask questions."

Four. This is known as Matsuri, or the observance of yearly Festivals. This affirmation emphasizes the importance of community celebration via annual festivals that often include dancing, sumo, feasting, parades. For instance, March 3 is the doll festival, which celebrates young girls and features dioramas loaded with dolls displayed all across the country and is pretty weird I'm not gonna lie. I could do without this affirmation.

I mentioned that Buddhism has become intertwined with daily life in Japan, but again it feels less like a religion and it isn't native to Japan so we're mostly going to ignore it. Will save Buddhism for another episode. But it is important to acknowledge that both Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan have influenced each other and become incorporated in different parts of daily life. For instance, there are no Shinto funerals, Shintoism views death as the ultimate impurity, there's nothing more contaminating than decay, and as a result most Japanese funerals revolve around Buddhist practices.

Now Shintoism is associated with a creation myth, again this is not something that has been officially codified and sanctioned by any religious authority, it's not scripture, but it does represent the culmination of an ancient and established oral tradition. The first attempt at compiling and standardizing the creation myth occurred around the 8th century CE, and took the form of the Kojiki, the first text to spell out the foundational legends of Japanese mythology and also the oldest known literary work in Japan. Kojiki translates to "An account of ancient matters." it was commissioned by Empress Genmei, and it seems that the main function was to justify the existence and rule of the imperial family, the Yamato line, by conjuring for them a divine lineage. It was state propaganda. It was a justification for their rule, a grand statement of how special and unique they are like a family of snowflakes. The imperial family of Japan is in fact the longest continuous hereditary lineage of monarchs on earth and also one of the least relevant because they don't monarch over squat. They are monarchs who rule Japan in the same way that monarch butterflies rule the forest.

They are very similar to the British

royal family in that they are basically celebrities and are tax funded, but have no actual political power. But they were established way back in the seventh century BCE, and the very same bloodline persists today.

Now the primary creation myth that is detailed in the Kojiki and the slightly later text called the Nihon Shoki is in some ways very similar to the Greek creation myth, which we covered in a previous episode. I don't know if you remember the primordial deities, this story is similar. In the beginning most of the action takes place in the age of the gods, the Kamiyo, and geographically occurs in the heavens, or Takamagahara, which is connected to the earthly realm by a floating bridge, similar to the rainbow bridge in Norse mythology. From a summary by the Michigan State University's Cosmonogy site, "Like many creation myths around the world, the universe started as silent chaos. Within this chaos, particles and light started to move. Light floated up faster than the particles, so the light is above the universe. The lighter particles floated up to form the clouds of *takamagahara* (高天原, The Plain of High Heaven). The heavier particles couldn't float up, so they formed a mass called Earth below heaven." So the primordial universe was like salad dressing, it was like

oil and water separating into layers. It was delicious. At some point and for no particular reason five gods popped into existence, these were known as the *Kotoamatsukami* and they were the original kami. This is my favorite description, it comes from the Wikipedia entry: These five deities...appeared spontaneously, did not have a definite sex, did not have partners, and went into hiding after their emergence. These gods are not mentioned in the rest of the mythology." They are the crazy hermits of gods... these were the Unabombers of Kami. These were the reclusive weirdos of deities. Divine incels. Of these five the first three were known as the creation gods, the *zōka sanshin*, and they consisted of the High Creator, the Divine Creator, and the Central Master. This was the first bureaucracy, they immediately formed a multilevel marketing company and started selling divine salad dressing. There were six more successive generations of gods that popped into existence, known as the *Kamiyo-nayo*, about seven generations of these weird hermits, but most of them are basically irrelevant until the gods started appearing in pairs of male and female, and this is when things get interesting, because now there can be sexy times. The last of the *Kamiyo-nayo* were the brother and sister *Izanagi* and *Izanami*

respectively, who were essentially Japan's version of Adam and Eve. Siblings in this case, a little kinky. Izanagi's full formal name is Izanagi-no-Mikoto, which translates to "he who invites" and Izanami is "she who invites, and yeah, they were both very inviting, a very hospitable, close-knit family. She invited him into that vag. So Izanagi and Izanami got married, because when you are the only couple in the universe it's very important that you have a wedding ceremony and invite the handful of weird recluses in existence and get a signed document indicating that you will be loyal to each other and not be tempted by any of the six other beings in existence. Now of course according to the Kojiki, Japan was the first land ever created. Izanagi himself created the land... he was given by the elder Kami a heavenly bejeweled spear called Amenonuhoko, which translates to heavenly bejeweled spear. He stood on the celestial bridge and thrust the spear into the water and conjured up Japan, he plunged the rigid erect spear deep into the fertile ocean in order to create life, are you picking up on these phallic vibes that I'm laying down so to speak. Note that it was the brother and not the sister who created Japan and he did it essentially with a massive holy penis, I mentioned that I really enjoy

many aspects of Shintoism but there is some serious sexism built in, this will be a continuing theme. And also tribalism you may have noticed that the first land that was created on earth was the island of Japan. And in fact, as far as the Kojiki is concerned, Izanagi probably should have just stopped right there and not spear banded the ocean any more because according to the text Japan is clearly the greatest country on earth and frankly there was no need to create any more. As with most religious books, the writers of the Kojiki view the existence of land beyond their borders as mostly just inconvenient, And that's how we know their religion is fake because clearly America is the greatest country on earth and the Christian God is the best God, the founding fathers said so, our god books are better than your god books et etc ad nauseam.

Izanagi and Izanami also quickly discovered sexual intercourse, I guess that was why they had to get married because you can't just be banging in the empty void like whores without holy matrimony because that sets a really bad example for the nonexistent children and other creatures. Am I driving this point into the ground? It's just like why does anything matter when there are like six beings in the universe and all but

two of them are creepy shut-ins. So now the sacred brother and sister were having sacred incestuous sex, we don't kink shame unless it's illegal, so I think we can kink shame in this case. They had a child and as you might expect it was deformed, a little bit of realism creeping into the story, it was born without limbs or bones, so the happy couple abandoned the child to die. Just in case I oversold this religion as being too perfect and without flaw, you're probably starting to pick up on the fact that the origin myth is pretty fucked up. Now the text of the Kojiki strongly implies that the child was deformed not because it was the product of incest but rather as a result of Izanami breaking protocol and being punished: she spoke first during a mating ritual (the two had built a pillar on the island of Japan and circled it in opposite directions, and when they met, Izanami greeted her husband, like a dumb bitch. What was she thinking? Just like Eve in the garden, the first woman is destined to set a bad example that every other succeeding female needs to learn from, don't eat apples or talk before sex. Mostly just do whatever you're told by whatever guy happens to be around. Just like Christianity and Islam certainly and pretty much every other religion, Shintoism was infused with this kind of blatant sexism from the jump. Anyway, the

abandoned child was named Hiruko based on its appearance, which translates to Leech child, ouch, and he would actually survive, who needs bones, that's totally doable, over time his legend bled into the legend of the god of fishermen, Ebisu, so Hiruko and Ebisu are now interchangeable. He is one of the seven gods of fortune, and he is particularly notable for being the only one who originated purely from medieval Japan without any influence from Buddhism or Taoism. So Izanagi and Izanami had more children, and these became the other islands of Japan. So if you're not on the mainland of Japan, you're on one of the deformed incest children. So now brother and sister were boning a lot, creating all kinds of land masses with Izanami's vagina, but then she had the misfortune to give birth to fire, and that was just one step too far. I love how passings landmasses out of her birth canal had been feasible, but whoever came up with this myth was like, there has to be a limit. We're starting to stretch the bounds of credibility as much as those islands stretched her vagina. Rocks and boulders and dirt are one thing, but flames and vaginas, no sir. So after birthing a fire-baby (way worse than a food baby), Izanami became gravely ill. "From her vomit came the deity of metals, from her excrement came the deity of clay,

from her urine came the deity of fresh growth." Nothing contributed to the growth of fresh crops like urine. Finally, Izanami perished. In a blind rage, Izanagi beheaded the fire-baby that he blamed it for Izanami's death. The blood that sprayed from its little infant fire body became Japan's active volcanoes. When he finished his tantrum, Izanagi was so distraught that he traveled to the land of the dead—which in Japanese mythology is known as yellow spring or Yomi—to retrieve Izanami. When he found her, Izanami explained that she had already eaten from the fruit of the dead, which meant that she was doomed to remain forever, but that she would try to arrange for her release as long as he made a promise not to come back and look for her. Izanagi promised, but after time passed he became impatient; he journeyed into the darkness of Yomi and lit a comb from his hair to light his surroundings, which revealed his wife, half decomposed and covered with maggots. At this point he decided that maybe the relationship wasn't going to work out, irreconcilable differences, and tried to bail, but Izanami, humiliated and angry at the betrayal, pursued him. He escaped and used a boulder to plug the entrance to Yomi. Izanami's rage inspired her to curse her brother/husband and also the world

at large, she swore that she would kill 1000 people a day in the land of the living. Izanami said fine, if you want to play it like that, we'll turn this into a numbers game, and he vowed to father 1500 children a day. Which isn't really possible because there's a nine month delay...plus he'd have to be breeding with his offspring, and it would take years for them to hit puberty, I don't know, it turns out the arithmetic of religious sexual murder-birth-curse rivalries is sketchy, who would've guessed. But this portion of the myth supposedly explains the cycle of life and death. You're born and die as the result of a bitter sex-feud between a jerk and a zombie. But even though Izanagi had escaped the land of Yomi, he was tainted by his contact with the land of the dead, and began to experience misfortunes until he finally bathed himself in the ocean to wash away the underworld funk, spawning the concept of purification rituals.

when Izanagi bathed himself, the water that washed off of him became more Kamis: He first cleaned left eye, creating the most important Kami of them all, Amaterasu, goddess of the sun. Next from cleaning his right eye he spawned Tsukuyomi, Kami of the moon. And then their brother Susanoo shot directly out of Izanagi's nose. Gross. This snot Kami, Susanoo, would become the

storm god. So none of these sweat/tears and snot Kamis could figure out how to get along: Tsukuyomi and Amaterasu clashed, the sun and moon, which caused the night and day to be separated, and then storm god Susanoo became jealous of Amaterasu's power as sun goddess. He threw fits and was banished from the land of the gods. Amaterasu was so upset about Susanoo's tantrums that she hid her sunny self in a cave, causing darkness to descend across the land. Other Kami tried to coax her out of the cave to no avail. Finally a female Kami performed a sexy dance, which the other Kami found very entertaining and amusing, and Amaterasu came out of the cave to see what all the fuss was about. Didn't want to miss out on some godly stripper action. Amaterasu is the central and most important deity in Shintoism, she is the Kami of the sun, she created the cultivation of rice and wheat and silkworms. And did you know that the silkworms are boiled in the making of silk? Around 3000 silkworms are killed for each pound of silk. That was so traumatizing to me when I found it out recently. Anyway more about Amaterasu: her primary shrine is the grand shrine of Issei and she could also technically be considered the goddess of fascism. It was she who dictated that Japan should be ruled by an

imperial monarchy, which began with her own great grandson, at least according to the imperial monarchy. The first ever emperor—according to legend—was Jimmu, the grandson of the son of the sun goddess. So for generations the descendants of the imperial family were consistently considered children of the Sun; however after the Japanese loss WWII, in 1946 the Allies forced Emperor Showa to renounce his divinity in what is known as the Humanity Declaration, which ended Imperial Rule. It reads, "The ties between Us and Our people have always stood upon mutual trust and affection. They do not depend upon mere legends and myths. They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine, and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world." A little scary that the last part needed to be in there. "We officially concede that genocide and world domination were not the best ideas." The Humanity Declaration paved the way for a new constitution in Japan.

So we've covered creation, and now we're going to dip into some other famous areas of Japanese mythology, obviously I'm picking and choosing here because there's way too much to cover in one episode, but I think these are some

of the most important elements.
We'll start with the

YOKAI

if you are all at all familiar with Japanese mythology you have heard of the Yokai. And even if you aren't familiar with Japanese mythology, if you occasionally browse Netflix or other streaming services you've probably either watched or heard of the anime movie Princess Mononoke, the word Mononoke is interchangeable with Yokai these entities are often referred to as demons but that's not really accurate, they are Shapeshifting monsters or spirits that in many ways are hard to distinguish from Kami. They can exist in many forms: animal, plants, inanimate object, human, and they can be benevolent or malevolent or mischievous. So they can be anything, with any motives, at any time. It's confusing. The first reference to Yokai is in the Shoku Nihongi, which was the third famous Japanese literary text dealing with mythology after Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki. But in that first version the term is simply used to indicate strange phenomena that might appear in the imperial Court, and which prompted purification rituals. Over time, the literary tradition changed these strange phenomena into actual identifiable creatures. My favorite Yokai are Nekomata, or

domestic cats that have bailed on their owners and run away to the mountains, where they transformed into monsters and now attack and consume humans. And also apparently wear kimonos and play lutes and grow long black human-like hair on their heads, if online image searches are to be believed. They're murderous rock 'n' roll samurai cats and I pretty much love them, I'll post one in the discord.

Now the most well-known and frequently depicted of the Yokai by far are the Oni, and you know what they look like even if the name isn't familiar. These are the evil demon-like creatures that are often depicted in the form of red-faced masks with horns and long teeth or tusks; occasionally they have a large eye in the center of their foreheads. I had never seen their bodies, they are hulking, trollish, three-fingered monsters who carry clubs and are murderous and frequently cannibalistic. But they also can be bringers of good luck and fortune and wealth...if they don't eat you. So, silver lining. The most famous Oni was the demon-king Shuten-doji, who legend claims terrorized the people of Kyoto in the early 1000 CE, primarily abducting and murdering young women. Like Jack the Ripper. Shuten the Ripper. Emperor Ichijo sent a party of heroes to track down and kill the

demon...this has shades of Beowulf. The warriors were able to gain entrance to the Oni stronghold by pretending to be priests, so these were very respectful trolls. Shutendoji actually gave them lodging and fed them, and regaled them over dinner with tales of his life, including the history of his people who had been displaced from their ancestral home in the Hira Mountains because the humans had built a temple there. He also mentioned his love of sake—his nickname, he claimed, was the “sake-drinking lad.” Kind of a whimsical nickname for a monster who slaughters women. Jack the Ripper, known to his friends as a whiskey drinking lad. Now one of the heroes of the tale, Raiko, offered the demon sake which left him incapacitated. And shortly decapitated...Raiko chopped off the demon's head, but Shutendoji wasn't that easy to kill...his severed head snapped at Raiko, who had luckily or strategically worn two extra helmets and was saved. Gotta double bag it when you're gettin down and dirty with a demon.

That's what I always say.

Now I should mention that there is another popular form of the red-faced demon mask, and this is the so-called Hannya mask. These look very similar to the Oni, but Oni are male ogres while Hannya are instead jealous female demons that

became a cliché in plays of the Noh theater. These are some sexist ass tropes, let's be honest...the Hannya represent women whose intense jealousy turned them into hideous inhuman creatures. Bitches be crazy.

Banchō Sarayashiki

So we're not going to get very deep into random ghost stories, we can save that for another episode but I feel like we have to include this one because of its connection to both ghosts and pop culture. The most popular version of the legend was actually based on a play written in the 18th century. The Banchō Sarayashiki, which translates to the dish mansion at Bancho. The story revolves around two characters: a samurai named Aoyama Tessan and his beautiful servant woman Okiku. This samurai was a sleazebag, basically Japanese Harvey Weinstein, a real creepy perv who was constantly trying to force his affections on his servant, but Okiku refused his advances. In order to trap her into a marriage, the samurai accused her of losing one of his family's ten prized Delftware plates, these valuable dishes created in Holland based on Asian designs, these were highly prized even though they were essentially knock offs of Japanese ceramics, so I'm not sure why he didn't just

buy some actual authentic Japanese plates, it would be like you and me importing McDonald's hamburgers from Holland. but I guess this isn't super relevant to the story. So, panicked, Okiku desperately counted and re-counted the plates, but always came up short. When she tearfully confessed to her master, he offered forgiveness if she would agree to be his wife. She refused. In a rage, Aoyama Tessan threw her down a well, where she perished. But her spirit was restless and haunted the mansion, in various ways depending on the source material. In one version of the story, she relentlessly counted to nine and then uttered an ear piercing shriek when she reached the word ten to mimic the sound of a shattering dish. In another interpretation, the scream at the word ten was a result of her anguish over the missing dish. Still another version ends with an exorcist finishing her count by yelling the word ten for her, which pacifies the spirit, who is finally able to rest believing that the final dish has been found. There are so many versions, in another popular version the villain is actually the wife of the samurai who breaks the dish out of jealousy in an attempt to eliminate the woman she viewed as her rival.

If a dead ghost-girl in a well rings any bells that's because this story

was the inspiration for the movie series the ring, just add a VCR and some analog video static and you have horror movie gold.

Obviously we haven't even scratched the surface of the dense and complex subject that is Japanese mythology. I'm not fooling myself here, but I think we've provided a serviceable overview of Shinto and some of the foundational Japanese legends. If you end up randomly visiting a Shinto shrine you won't make a fool of yourself, and you won't have funky breath and offend any Kamis. You're welcome.

We have a new Maniac! Ryan Roman joined as a menace and then upgraded to the highest tier. And gave us two names, finally, plus some alliteration.

Ryan Roman just edited their pledge to \$10.00.

PATREON



Ryan Roman just edited their pledge
from \$5.00 to \$10.00.

Email: ryanjroman28@gmail.com

New £3.00 patron! 🎉 Meet Paul Elliott

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