Japan

日本神話



Yamata no Orochi, the eight-headed serpent

Amaterasu and the Heavenly Rock Cave

The kitsune, messenger of Inari

Urashima Tarō and the Dragon Palace

20 FIGURES TO FIND IN THE LAND

THE JAPANESE ARCHIPELAGO

IN THIS ISSUE

Contents

	Introduction
	How Japan Holds Its Myths
FEATURE	Yamata no Orochi
I	Creation & Founding — The Age of the Gods
II	Gods & Goddesses — The Kami
III	Creatures & Guardians — Yōkai and Protectors
IV	The Unusual and Odd — Stranger Narratives
	A note on respect



Kitsune, the fox spirit, before the gates of Inari

INTRODUCTION

Japanese Mythology Field Guide

Names, attributes, and narratives from Japan's creation myths, its kami, its yōkai and guardians, and its stranger tales — organised so each entry can be used as a search target in deliberate pareidolia practice.

In the oldest Japanese account, the islands themselves are born as children of the gods — a tradition that already treats the land as a living, storied body.

The islands themselves are born as children of the gods.

CONTEXT

How Japan Holds Its Myths

Japanese mythology centres on the kami — spirits present in mountains, rivers, trees, ancestors and natural forces — honoured in Shintō shrines. Buddhism, arriving in the 6th century, blended with Shintō for over a thousand years. Folk belief adds a vast population of yōkai: spirits, shape-shifters and creatures of the countryside.

Mountains such as Fuji and Miwa are themselves treated as sacred bodies.

SOURCES

The Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters, 712 CE) and the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan, 720 CE) record the creation and the age of the gods. The regional Fudoki gazetteers (from 713 CE) preserve local legends of places. Later folklore, Edo-period illustrated catalogues of yōkai and oral tradition supply the creatures and stranger tales.



The crane with outspread wings

A JAPANESE PRECEDENT

In the Kojiki, Izanagi and Izanami stir the ocean with a jewelled spear; brine dripping from its tip forms the first island, and the islands of Japan are then born to them one by one. Mountains such as Fuji and Miwa are themselves treated as sacred bodies. The land as a born, living figure is central to the tradition.



Yamata no Orochi — eight heads drinking from eight vats of strong sake

THE FEATURE

Yamata no Orochi

八岐大蛇

Eight-headed, eight-tailed serpent.

Susanoo sets out eight vats of strong sake; each head drinks and the serpent falls asleep, and he cuts it to pieces.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

Eight branching heads or tails — river systems and peninsulas.

Kitsune 狐

Fox spirit; gains tails with age, up to nine.

Can be a faithful messenger of Inari or a trickster who takes human form.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A fox with fanned tails.



A white fox of Inari beside a tunnel of red torii gates

THE TWO BEST FIRST TARGETS

1. Yamata no Orochi — the eight-headed, eight-tailed serpent; branching river systems and peninsulas suit it. 2. The kitsune (fox), messenger of Inari, with its many tails. Strong alternates: the turtle of Urashima Tarō, the tengu, and Amaterasu emerging from the cave.



I · CREATION & FOUNDING

I The Age of the Gods

The divine couple, the birth of the islands and the sun's withdrawal.

Above: Izanagi and Izanami on the Floating Bridge of Heaven; brine drips from the spear

Izanagi and Izanami

伊邪那岐 · 伊邪那美

The creator couple.

Standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, they stir the sea with the spear Ame-no-nuboko; the dripping brine forms the island Onogoro. Izanami gives birth to the islands and many kami, and dies giving birth to fire.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two figures on a bridge; a spear dripping into the sea.*

Izanagi in Yomi

黄泉

The descent to the land of the dead.

Izanagi follows Izanami to Yomi but breaks his promise not to look at her and sees her decaying body. He flees and seals the passage with a great boulder.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A fleeing figure; a boulder blocking a passage.*

Amaterasu in the Cave

天岩戸

The sun goddess withdraws.

Offended by her brother Susanoo, Amaterasu hides in the Heavenly Rock Cave and the world goes dark. The goddess Ame-no-Uzume dances, the gods laugh, and Amaterasu peers out at a mirror and is drawn back into the world.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure emerging from a cave; a dancer; a round mirror.*

Ninigi's Descent

天孫降臨

Grandson of Amaterasu.

Sent down to rule the earth, he descends to Mount Takachiho carrying the mirror, the sword and the jewel — the Three Sacred Treasures.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure descending onto a peak with three objects.*

Ōkuninushi and the White Hare

因幡の白兎

Lord of the land of Izumo.

A hare tricks crocodiles (wani) into forming a line across the sea, is skinned by the last one, and is healed by Ōkuninushi with fresh water and cattail pollen.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A hare at the end of a line of creatures across water.*



II · GODS & GODDESSES

II The Kami

Kami of sun, storm, rice and the sea.

Above: Amaterasu is drawn from the Heavenly Rock Cave; Ame-no-Uzume dances

Amaterasu

天照

Sun goddess; ancestor of the imperial line.

Born from Izanagi's left eye as he purified himself. Honoured at the Grand Shrine of Ise.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A radiant figure; a mirror disc.*

Susanoo

須佐之男

Storm god; turbulent brother of Amaterasu.

Banished from heaven, he descends to Izumo, slays the serpent Orochi, and finds the sword Kusanagi in its tail.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A warrior with a sword above a serpent.*

Tsukuyomi

月読

Moon god.

Kills the food goddess Ukemochi in disgust at how she produces food; Amaterasu refuses to see him again, so the sun and moon live apart.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure turned away from another.*

Inari

稲荷

Kami of rice, fertility and prosperity.

Served by white foxes; honoured at tens of thousands of shrines, including Fushimi Inari with its tunnels of red torii gates.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A fox; a long line of gates.*



Ryūjin, dragon god of the sea, with the tide jewels

Ryūjin

龍神

Dragon god of the sea.

Lives in the undersea palace Ryūgū-jō and controls the tides with the tide jewels.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A dragon in a bay; two jewels.*



III · CREATURES & GUARDIANS

III Yōkai and Protectors

Shape-shifters, mountain spirits and river creatures with distinctive forms.

Above: Komainu at a shrine entrance — one mouth open, one closed



A tengu on a mountain peak trains the young Yoshitsune

Tengu

天狗

Mountain spirit; long-nosed or crow-beaked.

Masters of martial arts who live in mountain forests; in legend they trained the young warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A winged figure with a long nose on a peak.*

Kappa

河童

River creature with a water-filled dish on its head.

If tricked into bowing, it spills the water and loses its strength. It loves cucumbers.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A crouching figure by a river.*

Komainu

狛犬

Lion-dog shrine guardians.

Placed in pairs at shrine entrances — one with mouth open, one closed.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *Paired seated beasts facing each other.*



IV · THE UNUSUAL AND ODD

IV Stranger Narratives

Folk tales of time, gratitude and the moon.

Above: Urashima Tarō is carried by the turtle toward the Dragon Palace

Urashima Tarō

浦島太郎

The fisherman and the turtle.

He rescues a turtle and is carried to the Dragon Palace. Returning home after what seems three years, he finds three hundred have passed; opening a forbidden box, he turns old.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A man riding a turtle; a box.*

Princess Kaguya

かぐや姫

The moon princess from the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter.

Found as a tiny child inside a glowing bamboo stalk, she sets impossible tasks for her suitors and finally returns to the moon.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure inside a stalk; a procession rising.*

Momotarō

桃太郎

The Peach Boy.

Born from a giant peach, he sails to Onigashima with a dog, a monkey and a pheasant to defeat the ogres.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A peach shape; three animals following a figure.*

Tsuru no Ongaeshi

鶴の恩返し

The crane's return of a favour.

A rescued crane returns as a woman and weaves beautiful cloth from her own feathers, on condition she is never watched at the loom.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A crane with outspread wings.*



Yuki-onna, the snow woman

Yuki-onna

雪女

The snow woman.

A pale spirit of winter storms who spares a young woodcutter on condition he never speaks of her.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A pale woman with long hair in a snowfield.*

A NOTE ON RESPECT

Names follow Hepburn romanisation. Many kami are actively worshipped and some sites are sacred; tell the stories with care and confirm local versions with a Japanese source before public use.

The plates in this issue are interpretive illustrations, not historical artefacts.



A2A World LLC

Earth Heritage and Perceptual Resilience

© A2A World LLC 2026 · Atlanta, Georgia