

## **“The Medieval Serpent”: A Retelling of the *Kojiki*’s Yamata no Orochi Myth**

The Yamata no Orochi myth tells of the slaying of an eight-headed serpent by the deity Susanoo no Mikoto. A well-known version of it appears in Japan’s oldest written record, the *Kojiki* (712 CE), and it celebrates Susanoo’s victory over the fearsome monster. In this film, however, viewers are shown an alternative version of the myth that was told in the Izumo region during the Japanese medieval period.

The tale is narrated by Rian, a Buddhist monk living in Kyoto during the early sixteenth century, when the country was wracked by civil war and social instability. Rian traveled to Izumo—the fabled land of the gods—seeking insights on how humanity could be saved from the chaos. In Izumo, he learned of an unusual version of the Yamata no Orochi myth told in local records and lore. In 1523, Rian recorded the tale depicted in this film.

When he arrives in Izumo, Rian encounters an old man well-versed in the myths of the region. Rian asks him to be his guide. The old man tells Rian that the Yamata no Orochi once dwelled within the Amagafuchi (“heavenly abyss”), a deep pool in the Hii River. Rian also learns that boulders on a nearby mountain turned to iron after the monster touched them during its death throes.

Rian wants to see these boulders but receives a warning from the old man. Once, a regional lord trying to locate the site ordered his companions to clear the mountain of vegetation. As soon as they began, a tremendous storm arose. The wind toppled a large tree, which then transformed into an apparition of the Yamata no Orochi, much to the horror of the men!

Hearing this story, Rian comes to believe that the Yamata no Orochi was not a monster, but rather a guardian spirit of the mountain. The tale reminds Rian of the importance of cherishing all life—even weeds on a mountainside—and he shares his revelations about the myth upon his return to Kyoto.