

Myths of Susanoo

This film presents episodes from the life of the deity Susanoo no Mikoto, who is famous for slaying the Yamata no Orochi (“eight-headed serpent”) in one of the most well-known stories from the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*).

The tale begins with the creation of the world by the deities Izanaki (also romanized as Izanagi) and Izanami. Together they create many new gods, but Izanami dies after giving birth to the god of fire. Izanaki tries to rescue her from the underworld, but fails; Izanami has already eaten the food of the underworld, and thus cannot leave. Demons and unclean spirits pursue Izanaki, but he escapes by sealing the entrance to the underworld with a giant boulder. Afterward, he washes himself in a river, and the process produces three deities: the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, the moon god Tsukuyomi, and Susanoo.

Initially, Izanaki gives Susanoo dominion over the sea, but later banishes him from the heavens for neglecting his duties. Before Susanoo departs, he travels to Takamagahara (“the plain of high heaven”) to visit Amaterasu. She is suspicious of him and prepares for battle. To determine Susanoo’s true intentions, the two deities engage in a divination ritual. Despite its ambiguous results, Susanoo claims that they demonstrate his pure motives and enters his sister’s realm. He then goes on a destructive rampage that results in the death of one of Amaterasu’s attendants. At this, Amaterasu retreats into a cave, plunging the world into darkness. She is eventually enticed out of the cave, and Susanoo is banished permanently.

Susanoo arrives in Izumo, where he sees an elderly couple weeping with their beautiful daughter, Kushinada-hime. Asking them what is wrong, Susanoo learns that an eight-headed, eight-tailed serpent known as the Yamata no Orochi has eaten all their other daughters and will shortly return for Kushinada-hime. He agrees to slay the beast in exchange for permission to marry their daughter. Susanoo lures the Yamata no Orochi into a trap and defeats it. After killing the monster, he discovers a magnificent sword named Kusanagi within one of its tails. He offers the sword to Amaterasu, and it eventually becomes one of the three sacred treasures that symbolize the authority of her descendants, the Japanese imperial line.