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### When Stories Become Myths

In today's society, stories permeate every stage of a person's life. From a young age, children are told bedtime stories, nursery rhymes, and taken to a countless number of movies specifically catered to their age group. It isn't much different from ancient times, when instead of a theater it was a play stage which told children and those with them about fantastical stories. However, these stories are often called myths, which by definition is different than an average story. For a story to truly be considered a myth it must meet a few specific criteria.

Myths are often part of a religion, and therefore, while seen as fictitious by many, are genuinely believed to be true by those members of the religion. That is not to say that a myth has to be religious to be a myth, but it is often the case as religious stories are more often preserved orally and can later be written down once a writing system is established. To tell a story is easy, but to have a story believed as truth when it possesses the otherworldly, often mythical characteristics of a myth, is a whole other task.

That being said, the public perception and use of the word myth has changed throughout the years. Now the word myth is often used to mean fake or a lie, since few people believe in perfect beings who can control lightning or the ocean anymore. From their perspectives, a myth is a complete lie, perhaps a lie with a moral behind it, but a lie nonetheless. However, a myth does usually have a moral or demonstration of that society's correct way of behaving. Sometimes

these morals are written down into formal laws called charters, but in times where either a writing system didn't exist or wasn't widely taught these charters often took the form of stories. These stories were purposely made to be tales involving improbable, and often fantastical elements for the purpose of memorization. Odds are a story about how dogs stiff each other's butts to find out who ate all the rice at dinner before humanity was born doesn't contain a lot of moral lessons, whereas a story about the consequences of stealing within the context of a talking spider and turtle is blatant in its intention. Both stories will be remembered, but only one will be looked to for guidance, and therefore a myth, while the other is purely for entertainment.

Myths, as spoken charters, are often a comprehensive reflection of their society, since they serve as models for that society. Within the Watunna, a culture in which the women hold most of the financial and social power, there is a story about the creation of the world as we know it today. Within the myth, one of the first men decides to take a wife, but can't sleep with her because she has puranas in her junk, if he tries to sleep with her, he'll get castrated. The story, within context of the female-led society, is very much a warning to men that marriage took away something vital. The man does eventually figure out how to bed the woman, which could be seen as a glimmer of hope for men; a hope that they may take away just a bit of power back from the women, that they might be just a little closer to equal. In this myth its not so much a group of rules the society is expected to follow, but what is believed to be a natural way of life.

It is through a myth's innate ability to both reflect and influence a society that they have stayed relevant throughout the ages. While some are outdated in aspects of racism or sexism, others still hold relevant and genuinely good advice for how to conduct oneself. They are not only useful for children to learn about how to live within their society, but in the age of the written word, the psychedelic quality to myths offer a unique form of entertainment as well.