

## EGSM – Mythology

### Content Warnings

- Explicit language
- Discussions of: cannibalism, religion, murder & violence (inc. towards children), colonialism & racism, sexism, war, animal death
- Mentions of: spiders, food, disease

**HELEN**

Yeah, none of my family members have ever eaten each other.

**MUNA**

No. Mine have come close, but no.

**(Laughter)**

I'm... if you're listening mum, I'm sorry.

**(Laughter)**

**[Show Theme - Intro]**

**HELEN**

Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusiasm. The show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host, Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers and today we're talking about Mythology, and I am awestruck to be joined by Becky, Jon, Liz and Muna. So, we are as always going to introduce ourselves alphabetically so, beginning with Becky today, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

**BECKY**

Hi Helen, thanks ever so much for having me on, I'm Becky Annison. My pronouns are she/her and I am one half of *Black Armada Games*. A games design outfit and I have designed award winning games much to my shock, such as *Lovecraftesque* and *When the Dark is Gone*.

**HELEN**

They're very good games.

**BECKY**

Thank you.

**HELEN**

**(Laughter)**

Next up, Jon, what do you do and what are your pronouns?

**JON**

Hello, Helen, yeah, I'm Jon my pronouns are he/him. I am one half of Eskew Productions, we work on horror and weird fiction audio dramas, some of which, all of both of which are Rusty Quill network shows. Our most recent one is *The Silt Versus* and there should be a season two of it just around the corner.

**HELEN**

Oooo. I mean by the time this comes out it probably will have started? But yes, very cool.

Next up Liz, what do you do and what are your pronouns?

**LIZ**

Hi, yeah so I'm Liz. My pronouns are she/her. I was an editor on the Magnus Archives and now I'm on special projects, and I kind of got given special projects when Alex just handed me this mop and said that I needed to...

**(Laughter)**

...to just do this sort of deep clean business and like really get this understanding of part of the business that he thought that I just hadn't had a chance to get into yet, so it's going well you know...

**HELEN**

Good, good.

**LIZ**

...the smell of lemon is much stronger in my life than it used to be.

**(Laughter)**

But you know I'm hoping for big things in the future.

**HELEN**

I'm sure you will achieve them.

**LIZ**

Ah, thanks, thanks.

**HELEN**

And Muna, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

**MUNA**

Hello, I'm Muna I'm she/her and I'm the other half of *Eskew Productions* as Jon said, we work on horror and surrealist kind of fiction audio drama. Jon didn't mention that he is actually the writer behind both *I Am In Eskew* and *The Silt Verses* and I do the production behind it and together we also work on the Patreon and all sorts of extra bits so, essentially what that means, I am the person who sort of kicks in the room next door where Jon writes and goes, no, no you have to do all of this all over again...

**(Laughter)**

...and you know in the middle of that we try and stay married.

**HELEN**

Aw, well, that all seems to be going very well so far and I am extremely happy for you.

**(Laughter)**

So, we're gonna, we're gonna talk about why mythology is interesting first off. I would... people can jump in at any point, but for me like the bizarre and occasionally disgusting things that happen in various myths is a big appeal, because I'm like wow, how did you come up with this.

Would anyone like to tell me why you feel that mythology is interesting? Or am I going to have to pick on someone like teacher...

**(Laughter)**

**JON**

I've got a relevant bit, but I'm way too polite so this is going to be the first time I'm going to jump in like this. I completely agree what you said Helen, I got into mythology when I was very young, my parents bought me a book of illustrated Greek myths...

**HELEN**

Ah.

**JON**

...and it's one of those books that you get your hands on, you open it, and you realise that your parents made a terrible mistake because it is no way appropriate for children.

**(Laughter)**

You know the first page was Cronus eating his children and you go oh wow, this is a whole new world.

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**JON**

**(Laughter)**

And with lots of children's fiction even when it gets very dark, you know I'd read a lot of Roald Dahl at that stage, it's still that fairy tale darkness where there's an instructional element to it, there's some sense of justice, the villains normally get their comeuppance. The protagonist normally use pluck or...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**JON**

...courage to win the day, and what really struck me about this book was how unjust, cruel and arbitrary the stories often were. Like you say, it was almost the first horror fiction I ever consumed where it was trying to make sense of a universe where horrible things can happen to you when you may not deserve them, and that's just the way it is. There's no moral, there's no lesson to learn from it, sometimes you might just be turned into a spider because the god thinks you're too good at weaving.

**MUNA, BECKY AND LIZ**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

Yeah, but that's an interesting thing because there are also lots, for Greek mythology particularly, there are lots of different versions of those, because some of them have Areadne...no not Areadne...

**JON**

Arachne.

**HELEN**

Arachne being turned into a spider because she specifically boasted that she was better at weaving than Athena, and some of them have Athena just being jealous and so I find that very interesting to look at as well.

**LIZ**

Yeah, so coming from New Zealand specifically, or growing up in New Zealand you've got different mythology that you get exposed to as well when you're growing up. So, you know the Māori stories of the creation of New Zealand, and also the heroic kind of tales that are related to that. So we have Māui as well, who people are probably now more familiar with thanks to Moana coming out.

**(laughter)**

But the creation, I think that idea of having an understanding why a place that you're in is the way that it is and having that very being quite specific to your area as well. It's interesting to me that that these things, even where cultures have mixed you know say more in Europe and Asia they would have still kept very much their own story about how things were and how things are, and it's got that sort of that social cultural reason behind it as well as the religious background that almost all mythology is linked into.

So, I really like that sense of that it grounded you in the place that was New Zealand, it was part of like how your identity is shaped is part of understanding that story, and then of course because I have essentially British heritage, I used to also read into the Celtic myths. I quite liked reading into those because it gives you that other sense of like, well what's this other landscape which is linked you know very specifically to me, so what... how did it think about itself and what were its heroes. So, I used to really enjoy reading the Celtic mythology as well as the Māori mythology as well.

**HELEN**

That's really interesting I really don't know much about Celtic mythology I have a vague impression of giants at some point.

**LIZ**

**(laughs)**

Yeah, like there's Finn McCool, which I named one of my cats after Finn McCool...

**(laughter)**

...but it's such a great name like Finn McCool I mean, c'mon like.

**(laughter)**

**HELEN**

Oh, Finn that's an Irish Finn?

**LIZ**

I think he goes across to Scotland as well like I think, is he not linked to the Causeway? Like the Giant's Causeway is linked to that character.

**HELEN**

Oh. Mmm.

**LIZ**

But you've got that crossover of the regions where you know even though it's Ireland you've got those stories being mixed because they would have been talking to one another across the water, so to speak.

**HELEN**

Ah, that's so cool and Giant's Causeway is so cool. I'd like to visit it someday.

**LIZ**

Yeah, I'm probably completely wrong because I'm always completely wrong at least once on this show.

**(laughter)**

**HELEN**

Okay.

**(Laughter)**

Let us know before we release it, and we'll just edit that out.

**LIZ**

Never!

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

Well, I mean one of the reasons why I have enjoyed mythology in the past is because I feel actually a mix of both what both Jon and Liz have just said, because I moved to Europe when I was younger, I am from Somalia and which is in East Africa for those who don't know and I initially started getting into mythology because I actually really enjoyed Xena and Hercules when I was younger, I don't know if anybody watched those tv shows...

**(laughter)**

**LIZ**

Oh yes!

**(laughter)**

**MUNA**

...and I would come home from school, and I would watch them and my mother would just wouldn't understand why I was watching these shows and so from there I then wanted to study archaeology at university, and I wasn't necessarily interested in the excavating part you know just sort of being in deserts and brushing at sand for hours. It was more about how did these myths come to be part of entire communities and cultures, and then when I started researching universities I realised they actually don't let you study that until PHD level...

**HELEN**

Oh.

**MUNA**

...and then I was like well, I obviously I can't do this, so I just picked English literature instead...

**(laughter)**

...but for me one of the things that I've really enjoyed getting to know more of in the last few years is actually African and Somalian mythology of which there are so many different stories...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

...because so far all I've really... all you really read about when you have British heritage and you grow up here, are Roman... really quite honestly Roman and Greek mythologies, actually more than Celts really, I don't really remember Celtic or Gaelic mythology studying that at school, unless you count certain bits of literature like Gawain and the Green Knight or Beowulf; but...

**HELEN**

Or King Arthur maybe...

**MUNA**

Oh yes and King Arthur! Yeah, absolutely, but that's about it you don't really study it in the way that you would study you know the Iliad or any of the other stories that you end up studying a fair amount; and so it's been really exciting learning so much more about all these different cultures and I guess I'll dive to into it quite a bit more, but one of the things that I enjoy a lot about African culture and African mythology is more the fact that it isn't a single narrative, so there isn't really one narrative, one story that follows a person, it's more about how mythology is part of the land, the earth, the water, it's very nature centric.

**HELEN**

Mm.

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

That's interesting though because like Africa is the continent that's got the most countries on it.

**MUNA**

Yes.

**HELEN**

But all of... like lots of those countries are sort of artificially imposed on the continent and so... argh, I don't know how to articulate this, I think it's

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something about how various countries will share similar myths because people were... like those lines did not exist...

**MUNA**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

...until people came along and drew them on with a ruler.

**MUNA**

Yeah, absolutely, yeah and actually a lot of African cultures, and I actually I caught myself almost there because I hate saying African cultures because obviously you know...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

...a lot of different countries here being swept into one word, but they... a lot of countries are nomadic and so people were travelling back and forth between various tribes and lands and so on; and so you're right it is you know the different countries as we know them in the modern time, the reason why these countries share lots of similar myths is because there were no borders when these myths were...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

...I guess being pulled into society. Or when they were happening...who knows.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

Becky, what are your thoughts?

**BECKY**

I was just pulling my thoughts together as I was listening to everyone else's excellent contributions...

**(Laughter)**

...and I was thinking that one of the things that I loved about mythology when I first, as a child it sort of came into my life, was how different it was to the organised religions that I had experience of which obviously as a white British woman is not exhaustive, but, in the sense that the gods that they talked, the God god that they talked about in church in church was so very different from Zeus...

**HELEN**

Yes.

**BECKY**

...and the Roman gods, and the Norse gods and the Celtic gods, and the like the idea that the Greek gods were off having these petty squabbles and rivalries...

**(Laughter)**

...and getting annoyed with each other in a really human way but with god powers. I think I found that absolutely relatable and compelling and much more kind of eye opening of culture and relationship with deity than the more formal religion that is the primary religion in the UK. As I said I can only really talk about church as opposed to other religions, but that the way that the major organised religion of Christianity talks about deity, it's not the way that Zeus was bed hopping...

**(Laughter)**

...with every animal, vegetable and mineral that he could get his hands on, and you don't have the jealous wife of Hera wreaking her revenge on relatively innocent humans and things like that...

**(Laughter)**

...and it was a very... it was a much more kind of visceral way of thinking about religion, but also much more relatable...

**MUNA**

A very human way.

**BECKY**

Mm exactly.

**HELEN**

Yes. One of the interesting things about Greek mythology I think is that it often doesn't try to impose a strict morality on things.

**MUNA, BECKY AND LIZ**

Mm.

**HELEN**

It's not trying to say ah the gods are good.

**BECKY**

Yes.

**HELEN**

It's... they portray the gods doing like terrible things for like for a different reason, often to be like you shouldn't mock the gods because they will happily fuck you up.

**(Laughter)**

**LIZ**

And I think specifically you know those Greek and Roman ones are very like very human, because you know if you go to something like maybe Hinduism where the gods have their own society, and they have their own things going on but they're just not jerks like most of the time like...

**(laughter)**

...like as you say Zeus is just a massive jerk.

**(Laughter)**

Like he is at 100% you know like too much power, white dude privilege.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

I think that line between religion and mythology becomes so deliciously blurred doesn't it at some point.

**MUNA AND HELEN**

Mm.

**BECKY**

But at some point, it feels like it's not blurred at all and there's a very clear delineation.

**LIZ**

Yeah, well I've always, you know I had one of those silly revelations one day when it occurred to me that I was seeing these things written down as like myths and legends from New Zealand, and myths and legends of this; and I'm like these are creation stories and these are like you know I grew up a little bit religious. So, I grew up with like you know Old Testament understanding of how the world was created, not that I particularly believed it and I don't think the rest of my family did, but you suddenly realise that that word is never imposed on essentially the state religions. Like we never talk about the mythology of Christianity, but there is one, right? Like, every religion mythology is really just saying these are the stories which particularly are probably not linked like I will give like things like Christianity and Islam a little bit of difference where you've got like say Jesus and Mohammed who were essentially real people where you've got I guess their stories maybe you wouldn't use the word mythology around them because they're linked to more historical events, whereas like you might say like the Old Testament, Genesis that would be like well, yeah that's a mythology right, it's a creation story and that's like 100% what every culture will have in some way, something which explains why they are here and what they are doing here; and actually even you know I grew up also reading a book which was fairy tales from around the world...

**HELEN**

Ah.

**LIZ**

...and I was busy thinking about that thinking, well some of those fairy tales are probably myths because the ones that I would read which were you know African were ones of like the spider, is it Anansi?

**MUNA**

Anansi, the spider, yes.

**LIZ**

And a few other characters and I loved those, like you know I wasn't so keen on the European ones, because the European ones were literally the fairy tales of like you know, someone wants to be a prince or a princess, does three tasks - job done.

**(laughter)**

Right, like they were very samey, but you know it was a book where there was a lot of those very samey stories, and then you got to other parts of the world and all of a sudden all of the stories were very exciting because they were following quite different things, and I think that was because they were actually more myths rather than fairy tales so...

**BECKY**

What's the difference? I was... before when I was preparing for this podcast and doing all my homework and my research so I could sound as clever as possible...

**(Laughter)**

...I was thinking like where do we draw the line between fairy tales, folklore, mythology?

**HELEN**

Mm.

**JON**

It draws back to a lot of what we've been saying I think, because other than the fact that mythology is in theory meant to go back to our origins to be looking at the questions of how we came to be, there's a huge amount of snobbery around it, and that comes back to things like...

**HELEN**

Yes.

**JON**

...kids in the UK being taught that Greek and Roman mythology that's Mythology with a capital "M", but if we're talking about the story of how the

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devil tried to throw some rocks at a town and he missed and that's why there's a huge hill there...

**(Laughter)**

...that's, that's folklore, that's seen as something quite trivial...

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**JON**

...and parochial, and not worthy of study. I was looking through a book I've got of Pan-African creation myths and the introduction by some very worthy academic was talking very loftily about how, unlike mere folklore which is just entertainment, mythology is these great questions...

**(laughter)**

...with who we are and what our cultures mean, and the very first creation myth was the story of a mythological hero pinching baboon's bums to make them red, and that's the story of how the baboon's bums came to be.

**(Laughter)**

And you know what, it's ludicrous to be claiming that mythology stands apart...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**JON**

Like, you know...

**HELEN**

Wimsey is a massive part of mythology.

**BECKY**

It's huge. I was going to say... I know that I wanted to talk about my favourite myth, and my favourite myth is the one where Odin transforms himself as a Raven to go off and steal the mead of poetic inspiration and he brings it back but as he leaves with it all in his mouth, he's transformed into a...I want to say a crow or a raven I forget please don't strike me down.

**(Laughter)**

But as he flies back with most of it in his mouth like he accidentally farts out three drops, and the people that landed on...

**(Laughter)**

...they're the bad poets sadly...

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

That's excellent.

**BECKY**

...but I thought that's you know, that's such an irreverent...

**LIZ**

Amazing.

**BECKY**

...unique... did you really need a mythological explanation for why some people are just really, really, bad at poetry.

**LIZ**

That is brilliant. I love it! I love that so much.

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

But I do think there's a little bit of that and I forget what the saying is you know whoever...what is it the hunter glorifies the tale of the hand or whatever, it's basically whoever writes the story decides which the important parts are, right?

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

So, it's whoever has first started kind of recording the... or you know how the myths were recorded and passed down, is how we decided which were myths and which were folklores.

I mean, one of my favourite mythologies well I guess like it's actually just like kind of a folktale really, but it is seen as mythology part of Somalia mythology, it's like there's a cannibalistic goddess named Dhegdheer, which was loosely translated means long ears and she hunts in the forest for lost children and there is kind of like a Hansel and Gretel type story of these two twins who try and escape her, and actually if you, you know, to this day, I remember my mother telling me this story when I was young as a... I don't know why she told me that actually thinking back on it, it's quite terrifying...

**(Laughter)**

...but you know when I was older and looking into it I actually realised well, Somali people are a nomadic and so were these stories told to children to stop them going off and exploring a new local area as we being tribes moved from sort of area to area, or you know did someone a bit tired or a bit drunk see a hyena and then come up with a bit of a story around the long eared you know cannibalistic creature that is hunting you...

**(Laughter)**

...I don't know! But this is kind of... this has been passed down to become a myth that now you know thousands of years later...hundreds of years later, we are still kind of learning, but I do understand how that perhaps in western culture wouldn't have been seen as a myth, that would have been seen as more of a folklore because it hasn't been... it doesn't have that kind of the gods and the kings and the queens aspect of it and maybe that's yeah, maybe that's one part of it as well that if there isn't a god or a king or a queen within the story itself then maybe it isn't recognised almost as noble enough to be a myth...?

**HELEN**

Yeah, I know what you mean, I think... what I think my definition is I feel like fairy tales are specifically aimed at children, folklore is kind of like mythology that does not have a through line, whereas like a lot of mythology you have the same characters cropping... but then there are some... No, scrap that!

**(Laughter)**

I am...

**MUNA**

There are some pretty, evil fairy tales that maybe are not necessarily that child friendly.

**BECKY**

I don't think they're...

**HELEN**

Yeah, but you still tell them to children anyway.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

I was going to say I think that they are intended for children even the very gory ones.

**HELEN**

Even the nasty ones.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

So, like the original Brothers Grimm are absolutely intended I believe to be morality tales for children.

**HELEN**

Mm.

**LIZ**

Yep, apparently when they were, from what I understand, I am sure it was Grimm's tales, but when they were composing that together or bringing all those stories together, they had after I think the first revision or the first time it was released, they had to change a lot of the stories to not be about the mums but to be about step-mums...

**JON**

Right.

**LIZ**

...because they got a lot of feedback that the mums were not so keen...

**(Laughter)**

...on like all these stories which talked about how all evil the mums were so...

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

Oh, no.

**LIZ**

So, yeah.

**HELEN**

Oh, that's really funny.

**LIZ**

So, originally a lot of those step-mums were actually just straight up your mum.

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

That's very funny.

**HELEN**

And so that's why there are so many like non-existent parents in Disney.

**(laughter)**

**LIZ**

Exactly, they don't want to be blamed.

**HELEN**

Yeah, I'm not sure that there is really... maybe the difference between mythology and folklore and fairy tales is just your amount of snobbery when looking at them.

**(Laughter)**

I think yeah, I think Jon maybe you were on the money with that.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

I'm sure there's some very erudite academic description which tells us very clearly which is which, but I am sure Jon's actually right.

**HELEN**

Oh absolutely.

This is probably anthropology 101.

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**(laughter)**

**HELEN**

But none of us have studied anthropology.

**(laughter)**

So, we're just doing our best.

**(laughter)**

We're going to take a quick break and we'll be back after what I presume will be some adds.

**[BREAK]**

**HELEN**

And welcome back!

So, due to my own failings we started talking about things before we came back onto the recording.

Becky, you had some interesting things well, everyone has some really interesting things to say just then about modern myth making and how it affects current politics in terms of say, for the example I would give is the 2012 Olympics in Stratford and how the opening ceremony is seen by many, is like a high point of British culture and all of us who had indeed been around were like no 2012 was still quite crap actually...

**(Laughter)**

...and there's a nostalgia for something that happened only ten years ago, and people seem to want to get back to what they think that was representing and now there's like a myth around how 2012 was so much better, but actually, I mean it was a bit better in some ways like...

**(Laughter)**

...not having a pandemic.

**(Laughter)**

But; we still had lots of problems and people were trying to forget that.

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

Becky, please restate some of your thoughts on that for the audience who were not there.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

I will and I'll contextualise them a bit.

So, I think a lot of mythology comes from human beings trying to make sense of things that they are frightened of, things that are uncertain which is why often early myths are so rooted in place, the deep dark forest, Poseidon and the sea, you know things which are out of your control which could manifestly affect your destiny, and I think that we see that again and again and again with political movements and things like that; and what I wanted to kind of draw out was that myths are felt very deeply in human beings. I think all human

beings feel myths really deeply, it's almost like the ultimate fan service, you know like...

**(Laughter)**

...every time somebody mentions a myth you are like it stirs something inside you, and I think that that is really powerful, and it's really important and there are people out there today who use that for their own gains.

**HELEN**

Mm.

**BECKY**

And I'm going to give a very ancient example so that I don't offend anybody, but I know that one of the ancient kings, I think it was one of the Edwards – I can't remember which one.

**(Laughter)**

It was definitely not a recent Edward and I am talking about you know...

**HELEN**

Aw, we've had so many Edwards.

**BECKY**

We've had a lot of Edwards. It was quite a long ago Edward and he worked very hard to associate himself with the more ancient myth of King Arthur for his time, because King Arthur was seen as this great heroic king, Golden Age for Britain, and if he could associate himself with Arthur then that would make him more popular amongst the people; and he was very much restating the Arthurian myth making out that he was Arthur's natural successor in very many ways, and in doing so very, very deliberately to manipulate the population to make him more popular, and I think that we see this time and time again, and not just with the ancient myths, but as you say, we are starting to particularly in times when we as human beings are feeling uncertain, or feeling under threat.

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**BECKY**

Mythology has a very powerful pull on us at that point, and we have modern mythologies coming out about those times and I would say kind of another example to lead on from your 2012 example, is the current, I would say quite mythologising of NHS, the NHS heroes.

**MUNA**

They are. They are.

**HELEN**

I want to also mention, because you've just talking about Edward and King Arthur. That also that goes even further back to various Roman politicians who would try to claim lineage from Venus; and I think Caesar also did so, but also made himself a god...

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

...in addition, like in his own right.

**LIZ**

And didn't they often reference Romulus and Remus as well with that try to link back into them.

**HELEN**

Yes, I suspect so.

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**LIZ**

Which is a great stor-... it's like one of those great like, how a city was started, well, two kids raised by wolves, you know...

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

And then one of them killed the other one.

**(Laughter)**

**LIZ**

And like what a great statue you've got...

**HELEN**

Hooray.

**LIZ**

...of like you know, the she wolf and the babies suckling and you're like – that quite interesting.

**(laughter)**

**HELEN**

Urgh.

**(Laughter)**

Yeah.

**BECKY**

And there's huge amounts of examples of this so like I think in America there is a lot of trying to associate yourselves with the Founding Fathers, isn't there?

**HELEN, LIZ AND MUNA**

Mm.

**BECKY**

And deriving a legitimacy from that. I think in Britain there's a lot of trying to associate yourself with Churchill...

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**BECKY**

...and deriving legitimacy from that.

**LIZ**

You know maybe you'd write a book about him or something, you know that would be a way of like you know...

**MUNA**

To spending your time.

**HELEN**

Yeah, you know one might, one might.

**BECKY**

Figures who I probably should, we should probably clarify were hugely complex.

**(Laughter)**

In the same way that Zeus was.

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

Yeah, I think you're right and in the same way that you said to mythologising of the NHS, and I think you mentioned, we were talking about this I think in the break, it's the mythologising of the Blitz. I think it was Liz who said that you know it was during the war and you know we were all in it together and at the same time, people are mythologising themselves and their families because often people will say you know, don't you know my grandfather fought in the war or you know my grandfather fought for your rights or...

**HELEN**

Yeah, yeah, it was about personal lineage.

**MUNA**

Exactly, so I don't think it is just, of course there are individuals who may try to claim their lineage to Churchill, or you know liking themselves to it, but I think actually a large number of people do it on a smaller basis.

**LIZ**

Yeah, yeah.

**HELEN**

Sure.

**LIZ**

It's like we've got like there's a hierarchy of mythology like there's a cultural social one and then there's... then it goes down to more personal levels where you have your own narrative, your own story of like your own creation myth for your family, for yourself...

**(Laughter)**

...and then you know you build up the... yeah and most of the time it doesn't involve exciting spiders, sadly, but...

**(Laughter)**

We should build that in though.

**(Laughter)**

**JON**

I think that's a really useful reminder for us and almost answers a question that we were saying back in the first half - is it really surprising that there are those commonalities, when myths are not handed down on tablets of marble, they are shaped by audience response, you know is it any wonder that people love the same stories of tricksters who always get away with it. It's the same reason no one likes it when Tom gets Jerry.

**HELEN**

Yeah, it's fun.

**(Laughter)**

**JON**

It's something that time and time again it's shown to be more popular and then the myth will be changed from response to that.

One Somalian myth that I really find fascinating, is the story of Arawelo who was a real-life historical queen who seized power through some kind of violence, it was a very big deal, but...

**MUNA**

Lots of violence, like tonnes.

**JON**

Oh, so much violence.

**(Laughter)**

But if you read the mythology around her you know, in any other circumstance she ought to be a culture hero, but lots of the folktales about her are very much revisionist takes probably written by men trying to make it clear that it must never happen again that a queen seizes power. So, they tell the story of how she castrated every man in the kingdom. Somehow, children still keep popping up in the story after that but...

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

Did they do a Daenerys Targaryen on her?

**MUNA**

A little bit, yeah.

**JON**

I think yeah.

But then in these stories she becomes the antagonist almost an ogre figure, the main... the heroes are hiding from in the woods, and they need to figure out a way to outwit her or overthrow her at every turn, when in another circumstance, she should really be the protagonist.

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

I actually think that brings me onto a point, where actually myths, the good guys and the bad guys of myths also change depending on how societies changing and moving, because in my mother's and my grandmother's era and this was you know, love their cotton socks but you know an era where women were generally a little bit more oppressed and you know a different time, a different society. They probably would have also... and they did kind of tell the story of Arawelo a little bit more as in she was the antagonist, but people our age, you know my age/millennials and so on, are actually taking ownership of Arawelo and it's become something in lots of you know my peers and other people that you know that you kind of know online and stuff who are calling themselves Arawelo point two OR, and so on...

**BECKY AND LIZ**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

...because it's claiming back something that you may have been told was negative, but actually you see the positivity in it and the empowerment in it.

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

Yeah, that reminds me of that statue of Medusa, if you know it...

**BECKY**

Mm, yes, yeah.

**HELEN**

...where Medusa is carrying Perseus' head. I do because I follow a lot of sort of Greek and Roman classists on various social media and, you're absolutely right, there is a reclaiming of particularly feminine mythological villains in a sort of girl boss way.

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

Yeah.

**LIZ**

Yeah, yeah.

**HELEN**

I do want to move us on a little. We've already touched on this, but I want to talk about what our favourite stories like actually are... we've got a lot of theory and concept down...

**(Laughter)**

...but let's talk about the weird stuff that happens.

So, Jon you've mentioned Procrustes - the worst bed and breakfast!

**(Laughter)**

Does anyone else have a story that immediately springs to mind?

**LIZ**

I have one in terms of like the Greek and Roman or I guess it's Greek is...

**HELEN**

Oh, it can be from any mythology obviously.

**LIZ**

Yeah, but I just... I mean I love anything with an animal, but I love the Pegasus one, because it's I think Bellerophon catches him, takes him to kill some dragony thing or maybe it's a Chimera, I can't remember exactly what it is, but then he's done that and then of course the guy thinks he's like super big man boss pants and is like, I'm going to ride you to heaven, and as they're on their way up it's like Pegasus just kicks him off.

**(Laughter)**

He goes on.

**(Laughter)**

And I'm like oh, so beautiful just like gets booted off by the Pegasus and then it's like that Pegasus just goes off to live on by himself without this dude who's just being annoying at this point so...

**(Laughter)**

...I enjoy that a lot.

**MUNA**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

One of my favourite bits in the Odyssey is when... so Odys- and one of the many times that Odysseus gets shipwrecked, there... I think one of the first times, they're on this island and there all these sacred cows there that are owned by the sun god, I think it's Hyperion, and they don't have any food with them and Odysseus is like, right we can't eat these cows because they are like holy cows and it'll go badly for us. He gets distracted, he comes back and they've kills some cows...

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

...and they're eating them, and he's like "Oh no, what you have done?!" and then the dead cows starts like move around and moo from like the pots and stuff...

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

Urgh.

**HELEN**

...and that's such a bizarre ghost story...

**(Laughter)**

...and then I think like they all get hit by a plague and that's like Hyperion both cursed the cows and hit them with the plague as punishment. There's so much weird stuff that happens in the Odyssey though.

**LIZ**

Yeah, it's always the weird stuff is the best bit.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

It is. It is.

**JON**

I think the brevity of myths really helps with that because you get something completely bizarre in a single sentence...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**JON**

...and then you're just left with it, and you go oh...

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**(Laughter)**

**JON**

...the first man uh, his daughter grew out of his thigh and was born out of the open wound.

**(Laughter)**

And moving on now...

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

This guy's daughter, just he had a headache, so he tapped himself on the head and his daughter...

**LIZ**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

...was like jumped out in armour.

**(Laughter)**

That's Zeus and Athena.

Becky, you were saying that you quite like Norse myths and from watching Vikings, which I know is extremely accurate...

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

100%.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

There's a lot of interesting stuff in there about Ragnar Lothbrok and Björn Ironside, and Lagertha and various interesting figures from that portion of

history, I don't know if you know anything about that or... because there is some weird stuff that happens there too.

**BECKY**

So, I don't know that I am a lover of Norse mythology, but mostly from reading the Eddas and things like that.

**HELEN**

I see, I see.

**BECKY**

...and I have to use my usual disclaimer that I think the Norse mythology has been co-opted by some very bad actors in exactly the same way I was talking about earlier people trying to associate themselves with myths and they have brought an interpretation to it which is not served by the original texts in many cases, and I think that there's some of... one of my favourite bits of Norse mythology is actually Ragnarok. Is the idea that they know that the end of the world is coming. They're expecting it's going to be a massive battle over it, and a lot of what Odin does is about try to find out more about this thing and stop it, and it's just this idea that the gods aren't all powerful, there is something that they're frightened of and that they're on a mission because they know a doom is coming, and I always kind of found that quite compelling, again kind of feeding back into the, are mythologies just ways that we can textualize our fears, and to see mythological characters experiencing in godlike characters and god characters experiencing that same level of fear, I find really relatable as I said earlier, and compelling.

## MUNA

My favourite myth is actually Somali, and it's an insane family right, so let me see if I can get this right. There's Dhegdheer, who I've just told you about earlier which is kind of like this boogey man and cannibalistic mother with long ears, and her victims were usually children. Now, Buuti is a shapeshifting human creature, who's one of the children of Dhegdheer, and she actually fell in love with the human race, not a particular person, but she just thought humans were very kind and very loving and so she risked her life to warn a village that Dhegdheer was stalking them, and as she was warning them Dhegdheer became so angry that she cursed her child to be a shapeshifter with a ravenous cannibalistic hunger. Now, Buuti had given birth to twins and five other children and Buuti ate five of her children, and only the twins survived and so...

**(gasps)**

...they ran away and after they found out that she had you know eaten their father and their five siblings and they ran away and Farax, so, it's Fadumo and Farax.

Farax actually got married and his sister, he lost his sister as they were running away, and while he was waiting for her he got married, but he waited over ten years and at this point he realised that he couldn't live without his sister, I mean forget his wife and his children at this point, but he really couldn't live without his sister, and so he prayed to the gods that he would be turned into a tree and he was turned into a tree...

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**HELEN**

Aw.

**MUNA**

...and he never found his sister again.

**BECKY**

Aw.

**HELEN**

Oh no!

**MUNA**

Isn't that insane?!

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

That's so sad!

**MUNA**

It's so sad.

**HELEN**

That's so incredibly sad!

**MUNA**

Yeah, I mean you've really... if you think you've got a wild family, I mean you don't want to be part of this family.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

Yeah, none of my family members have ever eaten each other.

**MUNA**

No. Mine have come close, but no.

**(Laughter)**

I'm... if you're listening mum, I'm sorry.

**(Laughter)**

**LIZ**

Ours was a family where you know if someone had lost a finger at the dinner table that was you know... it would have been fair game.

**(Laughter)**

For not getting it out of the way in time.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

I was going to ask if anyone remembers, because that's reminded me of a similar story where this old couple were very hospitable to Hermes and Zeus; and Zeus was like you can ask like one wish of us because you know you've been so nice and they said, well you know we've lived together we're in love and we have been so for many decades, so we'd like to be together forever, and so they died at the same time and both got turned into trees with their branches entwined.

**MUNA**

Aw.

**HELEN**

And I think that's the nicest bit of Greek mythology that I know.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**MUNA**

Jon looks really, unhappy.

**(Laughter)**

Why, dear? Don't you want to be turned into trees?

**(Laughter)**

**JON**

I... It's... getting turned into trees happens so often in mythology it always feels like a little bit of trick right, because the tree is going to get chopped down at some point by the onslaught of civilisation.

**HELEN**

NO!

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

No! There is no...

**HELEN**

Jon, why?!

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

There is no industrial complex in this world, there's only nature and...

**(laughter)**

**JON**

Birds pooping on you, it's all there.

**(Laughter)**

Overrated becoming a tree.

**HELEN**

You're a tree, you don't mind.

**(Laughter)**

**LIZ**

What you really want to be become is a fungus. Like a really, you know like one of those ones that lives underground and just talks to the trees and just spreads the nutrients around. You're not sentient...

**JON**

Knows the name of god.

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**LIZ**

...but you, you know you're pretty...

**HELEN**

You're basically immortal.

**LIZ**

Yeah, you're immortal your previous soul.

**MUNA**

Yeah, I was about to say it's really hard to kill you.

**LIZ**

Yeah, yeah.

**(Laughter)**

You basically own an entire forest, as long as the forest is still standing.

**HELEN**

We are at the end of the episode.

This has been a much more introspective episode than I thought we would get.

I thought we would mostly be talking about you know how Hercules has a fat ass, but... like...

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

I'm sorry that we didn't actually talk about the bum sizes.

**LIZ**

The

**(laughter)**

**MUNA**

But yeah, figure with the best ass so, you know...

**(Laughter)**

...anyone wants to chuck one in there.

**LIZ**

I'm just going to put it out there again, Pegasus.

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

I don't know I think I'm going to have to go with what Jon said earlier before the show started, Xena she has a great ass.

**(Laughter)**

**BECKY**

Yeah.

**JON**

I didn't say that!

**(Laughter)**

**MUNA**

No? okay, well I'm saying it, Xena – great ass.

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

Alright.

Thank you all for being on this show, this has been just like, aw just such a lovely way to spend my time, listening to smart people talk about interesting things.

Listener, I hope you have enjoyed it as well. I will see you on the next episode, but for now, it's goodbye from me, goodbye; and it's goodbye from all of them, would you all like to say goodbye.

**LIZ**

Bye.

**MUNA**

Goodbye.

**BECKY AND JON**

Goodbye.

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

**HELEN**

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**[Show Theme – Outro Ends]**

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