

Days of Dao

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Pitch

The days of Dao is a novel based on Chinese, Buddhist and Taoist mythology and folklore with some references to Taoist philosophy and tells the story of how the wisdom of one mortal is enough to teach even gods lessons in life.

A tale where characters from Journey to the West takes lessons from Yoda from Star Wars in modern day, where humanity has begun to relied less and less on the blessing of the gods.

Plot

This is the tale of an orphan boy, who was abandoned after birth by his family who could not afford to raise another child. Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, took pity on this abandoned child and brought him back to the Realm of the Gods where they bestowed him the name “Dao”, in hopes that the child would be able to find his way in this world.

Dao is raised in the realm of the gods and taught the way of the cosmos and he repays the kindness shown to him by being the faithful servant of the gods. In return, the gods bless him with unending wisdom and immortality (and a side effect of aging slowly).

The gods often lament their boredom because of humanities’ independence from the blessing of the gods and as a result, are often up to mischief and shenanigans after eons of life. Dao is usually the one to clean up their messes and often guide the gods back on to the right path. Reminding them of their duty and the important positions they hold to humanity as a whole, even when not called upon.

Key Characters

Dao

Originally a mortal boy, orphaned immediately after birth, Dao is rescued by the Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin and brought back to the realm of the gods. He was named by the gods after the way of the cosmos or the Cosmic Dao and was blessed by the gods, granting immortality and great wisdom.

While Dao plays the part of a servant to the gods, the gods all treat him as their son and is loved and protected by them all.

Dao is a calm and sensible boy who often plays the role of an observer to the antics of the gods. He can commonly be seen running errands or just doing housekeeping in the Realm of the Gods but always appears when someone is up to mischief. Dao usually tries to dissuade the offender from committing his/her misdeeds but never resorts to force to attempt to stop the disaster that is bound to happen.

Instead, Dao often allows the incident to play out, intervening only when humanity is just on the brink of extermination and when the culprit has evidently learnt their lesson. Dao often imparts wisdom and lessons to the offender and reminds them of their duty in the world. the

Guan Yin

The Goddess of Mercy and foster mother to Dao, she originally took pity on an abandoned baby that she came across and brought him back out of kindness. She did not expect to bring home a child so well received by all the gods who eventually all bless him and going as far as collectively bestowing upon him a name.

Guan Yin is also one of the oldest of the gods, and often have trouble keeping the “younger” gods in check. She relies on Dao to teach them lessons and to remind them of their duties to the world. Dao often seeks her advice when he is confused and unsure of the best course of action and Guan Yin is always more than pleased to share wisdom with her foster-son.

Hou Yi

The Divine Archer, Hou Yi, is one of the first few gods that have been forsaken. As humanities’ technology and weaponry advanced, the study of archery declined and eventually was eliminated in favour of the ever-powerful guns. Hou Yi fell into depression and often retreated to the mortal realm to pose as a human to partake in debauchery, forsaking his duty in the Realm of the Gods as the one to keep the Sun in rein. Due to his neglect in duties, the Sun has been rampant and an everlasting day has been plaguing the mortal realm to take revenge for his fallen brothers.

Dao would eventually step in, restoring the Divine Archer’s confidence as well as put a stop to the Sun’s plans for revenge.

Nüwa

Long ago out of loneliness, Nüwa created humans by moulding yellow earth and they went on to live and prospered on Earth, where the gods watched over them. At one point, the humans angered the Water God, Gonggong, who destroyed one of the four pillars that held up the heavens. This caused half the sky to fall, which created a gaping hole causing the Earth itself to crack and start a series of natural disasters which wreaked havoc on humanity, threatening to wipe them out.

Nüwa took pity on her creations and repaired the sky by killing a Divine Turtle and cut off its legs to prop the heavens back up again. In the modern age, the humans have long forgotten their creator and saviour and have turned to killing and waging wars as well as the accelerated destruction and depletion of Earth. All other life on Earth were not spared and Nüwa watches in agony, as she feels responsible for the destruction her creations have caused on the mortal plane.

She questions her decision to save humanity, regretting having ever made them after seeing the many atrocities humans were capable of and at one point she considered putting a stop them herself.

Dao appears and speaks to her, asking her some questions and reminds her that there is bad but there is also good. There are two sides to a coin and that she should not regret her decision, but embrace it and help guide humanity to a better future.

Setting / World

The novel takes place in present day, taking the current Earth as it's setting for the human domain. Technological advancements are made with each passing day, and age-old traditions being put aside in favour of new found technological comforts.

The Realm of the Gods exists as a giant continent in the sky, hidden from mortal view by ancient magics known only to godkind. The Realm of the Gods is a paradise that with mountains and rivers with its own unique biome featuring mythological creatures. Buildings reminiscent of Ancient China can be seen scattered across the land, and the continent is sectioned into personal dwellings of each individual god.

Major Themes

The main theme that is explored in the novel is the relevancy of traditional culture in modern age and how the myths and gods of old are still important even as humanity transits into the future and how the traditions of old still live on, even as modern traditions take over.

Self-discovery and self-reinvention also drive the story as the gods themselves find new purpose to themselves, even after being forgotten by mankind and 'modernize' themselves to fit in with the progressive age.

Regret and acceptance are also themes explored in the story, where the gods reflect on actions that they have taken in the past and come to accept the consequences.

Taoist philosophy is also heavily referenced as the lessons that the gods learn, to show that even with progression and modernization, the lessons of old are still very much applicable.

Inspirations

Guan Yin and Shan Cai (Tale of the Southern Seas)

In the myth, Shan Cai was a disabled boy who sought a teacher in dharma and found Guan Yin despite his disabilities. Guan Yin tested his resolve in learning and eventually she accepted him as her disciple and healed his disabilities.

This myth was foundational inspiration for my idea, taking the idea of Guan Yin taking in a disciple, which formed the basis for Dao, the main character of my novel. Following the theme of a boy who originally did not have anything, Dao was decided to be an abandoned child, who Guan Yin takes pity on and brings back, which is in line with her title, the Goddess of Mercy.

Another thing that mirrors the original myth is that Dao often seeks guidance from Guan Yin when Dao himself is unsure of what to do. Guan Yin, as his mother and his teacher, typically shows him the right path to take but never spoon feeds the answers to ensure that Dao is ever growing.

Hou Yi and the Ten Suns

There were initially ten Suns that would cross the sky one by one, but one day all ten Suns came out at once, scorching the Earth. Hou Yi was tasked to rein in the Suns but eventually resorted to shooting them down with his divine archery. The Suns fell after being shot and they turned into three-legged crows. When only one Sun was left, the Sun's mother asked Hou Yi to spare the last Sun for the prosperity of humanity.

This version of the myth is used as the backstory to how Hou Yi's divinity came to as well as the reason for the Sun's attempt to scorch the earth. Further details were added and the

narrative was extended to tie back into the theme of the novel of self-discovery and traditional culture versus modern culture, as well as to create a more believable character.

Nüwa mends the Heavens

When one of the four pillars holding up the sky crumbles half of the sky fell, which created a gaping hole, and the Earth cracks open. This resulted in a number of disasters and humanity suffered. Nüwa took pity on the humans and gathered five coloured stones which she used to repair the sky. She then killed a giant tortoise, named Ao, and cut off its legs to use as the new pillars to support the sky. However, because of the uneven sizes of the legs, the sky was tilted. Nüwa then stopped all the disasters that were occurring and the Earth returned to being peaceful.

This myth was adapted without some of the finer details to used as the backstory for Nüwa in the novel. The views and conception of the way of the world that Nüwa originally had was to pose a difficult question to the reader, and to invoke feelings of familiarity of making decisions based on personal feelings, then regretting them and consequently deciding to take the easy way out. Her changes in views and Dao's words are aimed to give confidence and to encourage readers to accept decisions that one have made and to embrace them. Instead of escaping and wanting to run away, sometimes it is possible to try and guide the outcome into something more positive.

Theorist

Sigmund Freud

Freud believes myths are sort of a collective projection, like a shared dream by all humans. However, he felt that the contributions that eventually form myths come from own's own repressed memories from childhood. The parallels of myths were explained via the fact that because everyone has parents, the resultant unconscious images would be similar across cultures. Most notably, his beliefs are that myths reflect strong fears and desires that are taboo and usually repressed in society.

Parallels in Chinese mythology and Freud's beliefs can be drawn, for example, in the case of Freud's Oedipal Complex, where a child's feelings of desire for his mother and to replace his father, can be said to be also expressed in Chinese mythology's common representation of female divinities being symbols of fertility or being motherly, while male divinities were the targets for one to surpass.

Ancient China was also mostly a patriarchal society and for a woman to lead was a common taboo. However, there are a good number of myths that still show female divinities as the saviour of the world, which is in line with Freud's beliefs that myths also reflect taboos.

However, one clear contrast that I feel is that most myths do not commonly seem to develop due to repression from one's childhood. Chinese mythology is more typically explanatory in nature, citing how things came to be or to praise culture heroes of ages past.

While only one specific myth that covered incestuous taboo (the myth of Nüwa and Fuxi, who were sibling divinities that were married), in the myth it was said to be accepted by the heavens and thus, not actually a taboo, while the myth itself was credited to be the origination of the idea of marriage in China.

Overall, while Chinese mythology does draw parallels with Freud's beliefs, those similarities can be at most deemed to be skin-deep, while deeper study into myths show more explanatory purposes.