RESPECT: **Grandfather Thunder**

Muxumsa (muh-xhoom-sah) Pethakowe (peh-thock-hoo-wey), Grandfather the Thunder, was father of the first people, and the Moon was the first mother. But Maxa’xâk (muh-khakh-kook), the evil horned serpent, destroyed the Water Keeper Spirit and loosed the waters upon the Earth and the first people were no more. Since then, the Thunderers, Pethakowe’jàk (peh-thock-hoo-way-yok), have always been on the lookout for Maxa’xâk (muh-khakh-kook) and other such evil water monsters, and when one appears, the Thunderers shoot their crooked, fiery lightening arrows at them, hoping to avenge the deaths of the first people and to make sure that none of the evil shall ever disturb the harmony upon the Earth or cause harm to the Lenapé (len-ah-pey).

Long ago, there was a time when Grandfather Thunder was forgotten among the people, unlike Grandmother Moon who has always been remembered and honoured. He became bitter and despondent over the neglect and forgetfulness of him, and in his anger, he came from his home in the west, calling out in a voice that shook the heavens and the Earth. Hidden in clouds, he crossed right over the homes and villages of the people. In his fury he shot lightening arrows at the Earth, killing people, burning houses, and shattering trees, and the clouds cried their tears of sorrow upon the Earth. Luckily, he never stayed in one place too long, and usually was seen travelling towards the east.

At first, he would come alone, but after a while his many children came with him, and they frequently brought fear into the hearts of the Lenapé people. Some would come from a cave under the falls known today as Niagara and others came from the mountains where they often made their homes. At the sight of dark clouds and lightening, and at the sound of the thunder, being the roar of the wings of the Thunderers and the shaking of their rattles filled with bones, which shook the sky, the people became most fearful.

Nanapush finally saw that his grandchildren were in distress and so he came to help them saying, “You have hurt and insulted your Grandfather Thunder through a lack of respect and thought for him. Grandfathers need to be remembered and honoured too, for they also, like grandmothers, have shared in the gift of life and in helping their grandchildren into the future. So, when you first hear Grandfather Thunder in the spring, telling you that winter has ended and that life is again coming to the Earth, burn tobacco and greet your grandfather with prayers.

Whenever you hear his voice, do this and you will gain his protection and lightening will not strike you. Grandfather Thunder has charge of the rains that water the Earth and make your crops grow. With the proper respect, he will be thankful, bringing blessings to you, and protect you from the horned snakes and water monsters, and he will come to bring you warnings!”

From that time to this, Grandfather Thunder and the Lenapé people have always been close. They listened to the wise Grandfather Nanapush, and they have always shown respect to Old Thunder and love him dearly, they always give thanks for his many gifts to all land and life upon Mother Earth.

LOVE: **Strawberry Legend (A Cherokee Legend)**

In the Beginning of the Cherokee World, there were two worlds: The heavenly world called ga-lun-la-ti, which was placed high in the heavens, and the lower, dark world where the forces of evil lived. Ga-lun-la-ti was populated with beings in animal, human and plant forms. All creatures spoke the Cherokee language and lived together in harmony. The Earth was but a ball of water on which gigantic fish and reptiles lived. The universe of the Cherokees depended on harmony and balance. Light was balanced by dark; things of goodness balanced by things that hid from the light of day in the shadows of the darkness.

In the beginning there was no sun, but a Great Tree of Life grew in the center of Ga-lun-la-ti. It lit the world so all could see, and cast its lights down on the dark waters below. So it was that the Creator lived by the Tree of Life where he tended the plants and cared for the animals. Sometimes, the waterfowl, the hawks, and eagles flew down in the darkness below; giant turtles and muskrats swam on the water’s surface and bathed in the pale light of the heavenly tree. The Creator led a solitary existence. When his work was done, he sat by the Tree, admiring his world around him and below. Sometimes he became lonely and longed for a companion, perhaps a daughter who would sit beside him in the evening, watching his creation live and grow.

Then, the Creator made a young lady whose beauty and grace touched his soul. He knew that she, too, would long for someone to run and play with so he created a man in his likeness and taught his children the things that he knew. The Creator found that his daughter laughed and sang too much; and she talked constantly. She asked too many questions. Why do the leaves of the Tree of Life shine? Who created the Upper World? Who named the plants?

Creator still lover her, for this was his daughter, but his constant laughter and questions, what could he do? The Creator had told them many times to stay away from the Tree of Life and not to play around its trunk. But like all curious children she had to see why her father said these things. First Man would insist that she not go to the tree, but every day First Woman would climb the tree to its highest limbs. One day she found a hole in the bottom of the trunk and started to go in. First Man was again insistent that she stay away from the tree but to no avail. She went in and fell out of the bottom of Ga-lun-la-ti.

Creator returned home to find First Woman was missing. He asked First Man “where is my daughter?” to which the young man replied “I told her not to go into the hole in the bottom of the tree, but she would not listen.” Creator did not know what to do as he peered over the side of Ga-lun-la-ti and saw his daughter falling towards the awesome ball of water.

Creator summoned the birds of the sky, to catch his daughter that she might not drown. They created a great blanket with their wings on which they caught her. But, where should they put her? As they flew above the deep waters, the grandfather of all turtles surfaced. “Here, place her on my back,” he said. The birds descended with the young woman, henceforth known as “Sky-Woman,” and placed her on the surface of her new home. But it was not large enough, the Muskrat volunteered to find land and dove to the bottom of the waters and brought up mud, which he placed on the turtle’s back. When she touched the Earth that Muskrat had brought, it grew in all directions, becoming the Earth that we know today as Turtle Island. The Creator knew that she would need more and so he sent down the plants and animals to take care of his daughter. He sent down the deer, buffalo, bear, rabbits, and squirrels to provide food and clothing. He sent the medicines of the plant people; cedar, sage, bloodroot, oak, and most importantly tobacco. Along with many other things, to provide for his future generation the Kituwah, the Cherokee.

When the First Woman, or Sky Woman, was happy with this world Creator sent First Man down to help take care of his creation. First Man and First Woman were now husband and wife. They were happy and all things were good, but as in all good things, bad will come, and First Woman and First Man began to fight and argue.

Harsh words were said on both sides, and finally the wife said that she was leaving. Grabbing a few belongings, she began walking away from First Man. “I am going to find another place to live,” she told her husband, “You are lazy and pay no attention to me.” In a short time time, the husband regretted his harsh words and tried to find his wife so he could apologize. Eventually, he realized that she was too far ahead, and he prayed to the Creator to help him. “Slow her down, Creator, so that I might tell her how much she means to me,” he asked.

“Is her soul one with yours?” Creator asked. First Man replied “We have been one since the beginning of our time. We have been one since you have breathed life into our souls and we shall remain one until the end of time itself.”

Touched by the man’s anguish, the Great Spirit intervened. Seeing the way First Woman was walking he began to make plants grow at her feet to slow her down. To one side grew the blackberries and to the other grew huckleberries, but still she walked on. Again he made the plants grow and to one side grew gooseberries and to the other grew the service berries, but still she walked on. The Creator knew that this would have to slow her down and so he went to his garden and grabbed a handful of strawberry plants and threw them to the Earth.

When they landed at First Woman’s feet they began to bloom and ripen, First Woman looked down to see the beautiful leaves and berries of the strawberry plant and stopped to taste just one small berry. As she plucked and ate the berries she forgot her anger. Finding a basket among her belonging, she quickly filled it, and longed for her husband once more. First Man, hurrying on his way, was surprised to see his wife returning, and oh! How his heart did soar. She was smiling! She dipped her hand into her basket, and got a berry and placed it in his mouth. He smiled foolishly, and gave thanks to the Creator. Taking his hand, his wife led him back down the path to their home, feeding him strawberries on the way.

BRAVERY: **The Great Flood (An Ottawa Legend)**

One very remarkable character reported in the legends, dimly seen through the mist of untold centuries, is Kwi-wi-sens Nenaw-bo-zhoo (Nanabozho), meaning, in Algonquin dialect, “The greatest clown-boy in the world.” When he became a man, he was not only a great prophet among his people, but a giant of such marvelous strength, that he could wield his war-club with force enough to shatter in pieces the largest pine-tree.

His hunting-dog was a monstrous black wolf, as large as a full-grown buffalo, with long, soft hair, and eyes that shone in the night like the moon. The deity of the sea saw that charming beauty of this wolf-dog, and was so extremely jealous of him, that he was determined to take his life.

So he appeared before him in the form of a deer; and as the dog rushed to seize him, he was grasped by the deity and drowned in the depths of the sea. He then made a great barbeque and invited as his guests; whales, serpents, and all the monsters of the deep, that they might exult and rejoice with him that he had slain the dog of the prophet.

When the seer-clown learned of the fate of his noble dog, through cunning Waw-goosh [waa-gosh] (the fox), whose keen eyes saw the deception that cost the wolf-dog his life, and the seer-clown sought to take revenge upon the sea-god. So he went at once to the place where the latter was accustomed to come on land with his monster servants to bathe in the sunshine, and there concealed himself among the tall rushes until the ‘caravan of the deep’ came ashore.

When they had fallen fast asleep, he drew his giant bow, twice as long as he was tall, and shot a poisoned arrow that pierces Neben Manito, the water-god, through the heart. Neben Manito rolled into the sea, and cried, “Revenge! Revenge!” Then all the assembled monsters of the deep rushed headlong after the slayer of their king.

The prophet fled in consternation before the outraged creatures that hurled after him mountains of water, which swept down the forests like grass before the whirlwind. He continued to flee before the ragin flood, but could find no dry land. In sore despair he then called upon the God of Heaven to save him, when there appeared before him a great canoe, in which were pairs of all kinds of land-beasts and birds, being rowed by a most beautiful maiden, who let down a rope and drew him up into the boat.

The flood raged on; but, though mountains of water were continually being hurled after the prophet, he was safe. When he had floated on the water many days, he ordered Aw-mik (the beaver) to dive down and, if he could reach the bottom, to bring up some earth. Down the beaver plunged, but in a few minutes came floating to the surface lifeless. The prophet pulled him into the boat, blew into his mouth, and he became alive again.

He then said to Waw-jashk (the musk-rat), “You are the best diver among all the animal creation. Go down to the bottom and bring me up some each, out of which I will create a new world; for we cannot much longer live on the face of the deep.”

Down plunged the musk-rat; but, like the beaver, he, too, soon came to the surface lifeless, and was drawn into the boat, whereupon the prophet blew into his mouth, and he became alive again. In his paw, however, was found a small quantity of earth, which the prophet rolled into a small ball, and tied to the neck of Ka-ke-gi (the raven), saying, “Go thou, and fly to and fro over the surface of the deep, that dry land may appear.”

The raven did so; the waters rolled away; the world resumed its former shape; and, in course of time, the maiden and propher were united and repeopled the world.

HUMILITY: **The Opossum’s Tail (A Cherokee Legend)**

Also known as: Why the Opossum’s tail is bare.

Many, many years ago, the Possum had a long, bushy tail. He was so proud of it that he combed it every morning. He sang about it whenever the animals held a dance. The Rabbit, who had had no tail since the Bear pulled it out, became very jealous. She made up her mind to play a trick on the Possum.

A great council meeting had been planned. There was to be a dance and all the animals were to be present. It was the Rabbit’s task to send out the news to everyone. As the Rabbit was passing the Possum’s house, she stopped to ask him whether he would be at the dance. The Possum said yes, but he would come only if he could have a special seat.

“I have such a handsome tail,” he said. “I ought to sit where everyone can see me.” The Rabbit promised to take care of the Possum’s special seat. She also promised to send someone to prepare the Possum’s tail for the dance. The Possum was very pleased and agreed to attend.

The Rabbit immediately went off to see the Cricket. Now, the Cricket was such an expert hair cutter, the Natives called him “the barber.” The Rabbit told the Cricket to go the next morning and get the Possum’s tail ready for the dance. She told the Cricket exactly what to do.

In the morning, the Cricket went to the Possum’s house. “I have come to get you ready for the dance, Possum,” he said. This pleased the Possum very much. He stretched himself out and shut his eyes. The Cricket began to work on the Possum’s tail. First, he carefully combed it. Then he quietly began to clip the Possum’s hair close to the roots! As he clipped, the Cricket wrapped red ribbon around the tail to hold the loose hair in place. The Possum, eyes tightly shut, didn’t know what they Cricket was doing.

When night fell, the Possum went to the hall where the dance was to be held. There he found the best seat was ready for him, just as the Rabbit had promised. When the Possum’s turn came to dance, he stepped into the middle of the floor, grinning from ear to ear.

The drummers began to drum and the Possum began to sing, “See my beautiful tail!” Everyone shouted. This pleased the Possum, so he danced around the circle again and sang, “See what a fine colour my tail is!” Everyone shouted again and the Possum danced around the circle once more. As he danced he sang, “See how my tail sweeps the ground!”

The animals shouted more loudly than before. The Possum was delighted. Now, to really show off his fur, he untied the ribbon. Then around and around he danced, singing, “See how fine is the fur on my tail!”

Suddenly everybody started to laugh. They laughed so long that the Possum wondered why they were laughing. He looked around the circle of animals. They were laughing at him! Then he looked down at his tail. He saw that there was not a hair left upon it. It was as bare as the tail of a lizard! He was so surprised and embarrassed he could not say a word. He dropped to the ground, rolled over, and played dead.

That is why the Possum’s tail is bare and why he plays dead when taken by surprise.

WISDOM: **The Wisdom of the Willow Tree (An Osage Legend)**

What is the meaning of life? Why is it that people grow old and die? Although he was young, those questions troubled the mind of Little One. He asked the elders about them, but their answers did not satisfy him. At last he knew there was only one thing to do. He would have to seek the answers in his dreams.

Little One rose early in the morning and prayed to Wah-Kon-Tah for help. Then he walked away from the village, across the prairie and toward the hills. He took nothing with him, no food or water. He was looking for a place where none of his people would see him, a place where a vision could come to him.

Little One walked a long way. Each night he camped in a different place, hoping that it would be the right one to give him a dream that could answer his questions. But no such dream came to him. At last he came to a hill that rose above the land like the breast of a Turkey. A spring burst from the rocks near the base of a great elm tree. It was such a beautiful place that it seemed to be filled with the power of Wah-Kon-Tah. Little One sat down by the base of that elm tree and waited as the sun set. But though he slept, again no sign was given to him.

When he woke the next morning, he was weak with hunger. I must go back home, he thought. He was filled with despair, but his thoughts were of his parents. He had been gone a long time. Even though it was expected that a young man would seek guidance alone in this fashion, Little One knew they would be worried. “If I do not return while I still have the strength to walk,” he said, “I will die here and my family may never find my body.”

So Little One began to follow the small stream that was fed by the spring. It flowed out of the hills in the direction of his village, and he trusted it to lead him home. He walked and walked until he was not far from his village. But as he walked along that stream, he stumbled and fell among the roots of an old willow tree. Little One clung to the roots of the willow tree. Although he tried to rise, his legs were too weak.

“Grandfather,” he said to the willow tree, “It is not possible for me to go on.” Then the ancient willow spoke to him. “Little One,” it said, “all the Little Ones always cling to me for support as they walk along the great path of life. See the base of my trunk, which sends forth those roots that hold me firm in the earth. They are the sign of my old age. They are darkened and wrinkled with age, but they are still strong. Their strength comes from relying on the earth. When the Little Ones use me as a symbol, they will not fail to see old age as they travel along the path of life.”

Those words gave strength to Little One’s spirit. He stood again and began to walk. Soon his own village was in sight, and as he sat down to rest for a moment in the grass of the prairie, looking at his village, another vision came to him. He saw before him the figure of an old man. The old man was strangely familiar, even though Little One had never seen him before. “Look upon me,” the old man said. “What do you see?” “I see an old man whose face is wrinkled with age,” Little One said. “Look upon me again,” the old man said.

Then Little One looked, and as he looked, the lesson shown to him by the willow tree filled his heart. “I see an aged man in sacred clothing,” Little One said, “The fluttering down of the eagle adorns his head. I see you, my grandfather. I see an aged man with the stem of the pipe between his lips. I see you, my grandfather. You are firm and rooted to the earth like the ancient willow. I see you standing among the days that are peaceful and beautiful. I see you, my grandfather. I see you standing as you will stand in your lodge, my grandfather.” The ancient man smiled. Little One had seen truly. “My young brother,” the old man said, “your mind is fixed upon the days that are peaceful and beautiful.” And then he was gone.

Now Little One’s heart was filled with peace, and as he walked into the village, his mind was troubled no longer with those questions about the meaning of life. For he knew that the old man he had seen was himself. The ancient man was Little One as he would be when he became an elder, filled with that great peace and wisdom which would give strength to all of the people.

From that day on, Little One began to spend more time listening to the words his elders spoke, and of all the young men in the village, he was the happiest and the most content.

HONESTY: **The Invisible One and the Rough-Face Girl**

There was once a large village situated on the border of a lake. At one end of the village was a lodge in which lived a being who was always invisible. He was a mighty hunter, whose Spirit Guide was Ti'am, the Moose. He had a sister who attended to all his wants, and it was known that any girl who could see him might marry him. There were few who did not try, but it was a long time before one succeeded.

Towards evening, when the Invisible One was supposed to be returning home, his sister would walk down to the lakeshore with any girls who had come to visit. She could see her brother returning home, since to her he was always visible, and when she saw him, she would say to her companions, "Do you see my brother?"

As it happens, none of these girls could ever see him. However, while some honest girls would say "no," most would answer that they could indeed see him. Then the sister would ask "Of what is his shoulder strap made?" Or, as some tell the tale, she would inquire about other things, like his sled harness or his bowstring. They would reply, "A strip of rawhide," or "A green sapling," or something of that kind, and each was a likely guess. But the sister always knew they had not told the truth, and she would turn her face away, and reply quietly, "Very well, let us return to the wigwam."

When they entered the wigwam, she would ask them not to take a certain seat, for it was the seat of the Invisible One. After they had helped to cook supper, they would wait with great curiosity to see him eat. Each would get proof that he was a real person, for as he took off his moccasins they became visible, and his sister would hang them up. They would also see food leaving his birchbark dish and disappear in mid-air, but beyond that they would see nothing.

Elsewhere in the village there lived an old man, a widower with three daughters. The youngest of those was very small, weak, and often ill, but this did not prevent her sisters from treating her with great cruelty. The second daughter was somewhat kinder, and sometimes stood up for her younger sister. But the eldest sister would hack off her hair with a knife and burn her hands and face with hot coals. Eventually her whole body was scarred with the marks, so that people called her Oochigeaskw (oo-chi-gee-skew), the Rough-Skin Girl.

When her father returned home from the day, he would ask why the child was so disfigured, and her sister would promptly say that it was the fault of the girl herself, for even though the father had forbidden her from going close to the fire, she had done so anyway, and had fallen in. The father would shake his head, and wonder what would become of his youngest daughter.

One day, it occurred to the two older sisters that they should go and try their luck at seeing the Invisible One. They wore their finest clothing and took great effort to look their best. That evening they walked to the end of the village, and finding his sister at home went with her to walk down to the water. Then when the Invisible One came, and his sister asked if they saw him, they said, "Certainly," and also replied to the question of the shoulder strap or sled harness saying "A piece of rawhide." Of course, they could not actually see him, and they got nothing for their lies, and eventually went home disappointed.

When their father returned home that evening he brought with him many of the pretty little shells from which wampum was made, and the next day the two older sisters were engaged in stringing the shell beads. Oochigeaskw, of course, was not included in their activity - and she decided that it was time for her to see whether she might catch sight of the Invisible One.

Having no clothes beyond a few rags and knowing that she would get nothing from her sisters, Oochigeaskw went to the woods and got herself a few sheets of birch bark. She made herself a dress and leggings of this, and decorated it by scraping figures on the bark. Then she found a pair of her father's old moccasins, stiff with age, and soaked them in water so that they would become flexible enough to wear. Finally she begged her sisters for a few wampum shells; while the eldest only called her names, the middle sister felt sorry for her, and gave her a few of the beads.

So poor Oochigeaskw, dressed in birchbark and wampum, and wearing her father's great old moccasins (which came nearly up to her knees,) started across the village to try her luck. And if her sisters' scorn was not bad enough, little Oochigeaskw's courage was tested further, for the entire village erupted in laughter and ridicule as she passed by. Her sisters tried to shame her into returning home, but she would not obey, and carried on to the door of the Invisible One's lodge despite all the teasing from the village. Some say that a spirit had inspired her, and walked with her to give her strength, and this may indeed be so.

The Invisible One's sister regarded her young visitor with surprise, but she told Oochigeaskw, "You are welcome," and treated her with kindness. As usual, Oochigeaskw helped prepare the evening meal, and when the sun was nearly down, the Invisible One's sister led her to the lake.

"My brother comes," she said, "Do you see him?" Little Oochigeaskw gazed along the shore. "I'm not sure..." Then her eyes lit in wonder. "Yes, I see him! But how can there be such a one?" The sister looked at her curiously. "What is his shoulder strap made from?" "His shoulder strap is... is a Rainbow!" The sister's eyes grew wide. "And his bowstring?" "His bowstring is... the Milky Way!" His sister smiled. "Let us return to the wigwam."

When they reached the wigwam, the Invisible One's sister took the strange clothes off Oochigeaskw, and washed her with water from a special jar. Under her gentle hands, the young woman's scars disappeared, leaving her skin shining and smooth. She also combed Oochigeaskw's hair, and as she did, it grew to her waist, black and gleaming as a raven's wing and ready for braiding. Oochigeaskw had not been treated with such kindness since her mother had passed on, and the joy in her face transformed it into one of surpassing beauty.

Then the sister opened a chest and took out a beautiful wedding outfit, and asked Oochigeaskw to wear it. She had just put it on when a deep voice said, "Greetings, my sister." Oochigeaskw turned to the entrance and stared at the magnificent young hunter. She saw surprise light his face when their eyes met.

"Greetings, my brother," said the sister. "You are discovered at last!" The Invisible One walked over to Oochigeaskw and took her hands in his. "For years I have waited to find a woman of pure heart and brave spirit. Only such a one could see me. And now that I have found you, you shall be my bride."

And so they were married. And from then on, Oochigeaskw had a new name: the Lovely One. Like her husband, she too had kept herself hidden, waiting for the right person to find her, and now that she had that person's love, she was hidden no more.

TRUTH: **Two Wolves (A Cherokee Legend)**

Also known as: **Grandfather Tells**, or **The Wolves Within**

An old Grandfather said to his grandson, who came to him with anger at a friend who had done him an injustice, “Let me tell you a story.

“I too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. But hate wears you down, and does not hurt your enemy. It is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times.”

He continued, “It is like a fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him, and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

“But the other wolf, ah! He is evil and full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It is helpless anger, for his anger will change nothing. He is envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

“Sometimes, it is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit. And this same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person too.”

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather’s eyes and asked, “Which wolf will win, Grandfather?”

The Grandfather smiled and quietly said, “The one I feed.”