

Cygnus: Pop Culture Superstar

Intro

Jordan: [Music]

Jordan: [Music] Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to On Starry Time where stars plus lines

Kit: equal stories.

Jordan: In this month, we'll be getting silly and exploring the pop culture of our constellation Cygnus

Kit: In this episode, we share our favorite and least favorite occurrences of the month's constellation in pop culture, very broadly defined. And then we take over the brand and wish upon a star for what we wish existed.

Favorites

Jordan: All right, Kit, let's get on with our favorites. And I gotta say, this month Cygnus I

thought would be more popular.

Kit: Yeah, definitely had to make, uh, some compromises and didn't see things that I maybe wanted to see. But, uh, um.

Jordan: Do you mind if I start with my favorite pop culture appearance of Cygnus?

Kit: Sure, go for it.

Jordan: All right. I wouldn't be surprised if this is also yours, but I am going with Cygnus the cargo spacecraft that is being sent up to the International Space Station in 20 different forms since 2013.

Kit: Mmm.

Jordan: Did you see this one at all?

Kit: I did not pick this. And I, I don't think I saw this. I usually ignore all space related things, but, uh, uh, yeah, tell me more about it.

Jordan: Yes, this is literally just a cargo spacecraft. They keep making new ones. It's expendable. But we wouldn't be able to have the International Space Station without, um, visits from this craft, which can carry about 6000 kg, which in space is kind of a lot. Um, 21 of them have been built, 20 have been launched, 18 have been retired. And the last one was sent out actually quite recently on January 30, 2024. I was under the assumption that maybe you had found this before. So let me send you a quick link.

Kit: [Laughter] Well, that's a shape. There's a circular component. There's um,

Jordan: I'd say there's two circular components and one cylindrical component.

Kit: Yep, that's right.

Jordan: That is right. Okay, great. Audience will post a picture of this, um, course spacecraft. But really what I was hoping I could get to do with you, you see, it's an uncrewed cargo vehicle sent up into space 20 times. But what I really wanted to do with you is to scroll down as there's been 20 of these. They each have a different patch or logo.

Kit: Mhm. Oooh!

Jordan: And really what I wanted to do was to pick

Kit: There are good ones.

Jordan: Which one was your favorite of the logos?

Kit: Oh, no, I automatically see ones I like. I like the 9th one which has a, ah, octopus on it.

Jordan: Yep. Oh, that was incredible. And what color is that octopus?

Kit: Oh, it's purple.

Jordan: You better believe it. Space octopus.

Kit: Wow. Yep. That one's really good. You know, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the 12th one, which has a swan on it. So this looks like, ah, it could be used for a sports team. Like a middle school sports team.

Jordan: Yep. Yeah, it's about that level. I like it.

Kit: You gotta love the number 16 here, which, uh, is got sort of a rainbow swan. And it looks like was maybe named after Katherine Johnson, which is cool.

Jordan: Yep. And this one's pretty recent, you know, 2021. It was built. And then we're getting to my favorite, which is actually the next one, the 17th. And this one's kind of got these weird. What are they called? Hexagons to it. It's very minimalist. It's like a white swan. It's also a black Swan. Looks like it could be the logo for, like, a very evil, like, data or genetic engineering company.

Kit: Do you know how you can tell that it's not evil, though?

Jordan: How?

Kit: The swan's eye makes it look very friendly.

Jordan: Very friendly. Well, that's how all great evil corporate logos work. Yeah. So I like to think, you know, each one's got its own little vibe to it. It's got its own aesthetic, as you would say. But anyways, long story short, my favorite is the Cygnus spacecraft cargo ship.

Kit: I have to say that I actually thought we did have the same selection because my favorite pop culture appearance was also a ship called the USS Cygnus But it's from fiction. It is the USS Cygnus from the 1979 film Disney film the Black Hole. I was shocked that I had never heard of this before as a person that loves

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Kit: black holes and also somebody that enjoys Disney movies. But yes, so this was a 1979 film. I haven't seen it. It is on DisneyPlus, so it's on the list. The short version or the tagline, um, from IMDb is a research vessel finds a missing ship commanded by a mysterious scientist on the edge of a black hole. So I love it. I don't need to know anything else about the movie. I'm sure it has no problems. And, yeah, I just couldn't believe that it existed. I am seeing, though, that the Rotten Tomatoes score is 43%. So [laughter]

Jordan: I went right to reception and legacy on this film as I had also not heard it, I mean, not seen it, but had heard of it. And some of the quotes that have been kept for the archives of time in regards to this film only make me wish to see it more, including this quote from Neil deGrasse Tyson in 2014 where he says quote "they not only got none of the physics right about falling into a black hole. Had they actually gotten it right, it would have been a vastly more interesting movie." Other quotes about it include, "even more awesome than the special effects is the stupidity of the script." I want to read just a couple more. Quote "In the final analysis, the black hole is similar to its natural namesake. Nothing can escape from it either. Not a glimmer of imagination or inspiration." And the last one that I want to bring up is quote "the film's cast were dead stars in their own right. If actors get paid to express emotion, then the cast in the black hole doesn't even deserve the minimum wage."

Kit: I can't wait to watch it. Yeah, so that was my favorite. Um, do you have any runners up for favorite that you want to mention, or do you want to move to the least favorite? I do have a runner up.

Jordan: Yeah, sure. Let's hear your runner up.

Kit: So the runner up was Cygnus X 1, a two part song by the band Rush. Um, part, book one, excuse me, it's called the voyage. And book two, on a different album was called hemispheres. Um, I had not heard the song before, these songs, I should say before, but I did put them on while, uh, BoP and I were having lunch one day, and, um, it was giving me some war of the worlds energy. BoP liked part two better than part one. I preferred part one. Excuse me, book one. Yeah. I liked the premise of, uh, a band just leaning into, you know, stuff about black holes. I mean, of course, we talked about Cygnus X 1 in our cosmic background episode, so, yeah, I liked it, and I was glad to see some representation of black holes in rock music.

Least Favorite

Jordan: All right, my least favorite was rather obscure. It is something called Exercise Cygnus based in the United Kingdom in 2016. It was a three day pandemic simulation exercise, um, based on a theoretical virus nicknamed the swan flu and said to originate from swans. Kind of mean that they made it swan flu, you know, out of all the animals to choose. Come on, swan flu.

Kit: Swans are scary. That's just a fact.

Jordan: I mean, here's the thing. They were testing in this 3d simulation the ability of prisons and local or central government to cope under situations of high medical stress. And, well, we saw the results about four years later.

Kit: You know, maybe they, maybe it would have been even worse if they hadn't done this. I don't know. I haven't read the report. But it is one of those things that you're like, oh, that's an aged like milk situation. You know.

Jordan: Aged like milk. That was my choice. Exercise Cygnus what was your least favorite example of Cygnus in pop culture?

Kit: So I'm going to keep it in the UK. Uh, or UK based, I should say. So there is a natural gas reservoir and gas production facility called the Cygnus Gas Field. It's owned by Spirit Energy and Neptune Energy, and it is exactly what it sounds like. A natural gas reservoir and gas production. Um, yeah. What do we need to say about this? I think that says it all. Um, I feel it's insulting to swans to name this after them.

Jordan: I hadn't considered that. Yes, we are going to use this to pollute, to kill swans. So why not name it after our future victims or current victims? So, yeah, all right, slap in the face to swans. I mean, I thought I went with bad enough to blame a pandemic on them, but

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Jordan: this is actively killing them. Given the sparse options, some pretty bad uses of the Cygnus branding that's already out there. [Music]

Wish Upon A Star

Luckily, Kit, that brings us to our last segment where we are able to wish upon a star and rebrand Cygnus into something we wish existed. Would you like to go first or second?

Kit: I'm happy to go first. I had two ideas. Uh, one of them I stole from BoP, and so I'll start with that one because it's better. So I'd like to propose the Cessna Cygnus which will be a seaplane, because, of course, swans both float on the water but also fly. And so I thought a seaplane would be a great choice. I'd love to see this be fueled by renewable energy as not to insult swans in the same way the Cygnus gas field does. But, yeah, I thought that would be a nice use of the Cygnus brand. I like the ships called Cygnus and so this is just kind of a natural development from that, I'd say.

Jordan: Um, but what did you come up with? Or for your version of Cygnus?

Kit: So I think I've sort of come up with this idea before, but something like, um, the Cygnus dating app. It's tagline, obviously, a mate for life. Maybe it's for serial monogamists, uh, something in that energy drawing on the swan relationship idea. And that was what I came up with, which I didn't think was quite as good as the seaplane.

Jordan: Think it's equally good, if not better. I mean, there are only a few things that people know about swans, but the whole mating for life thing, I think, has seeped into the public conscious. I think it's subtle but effective.

Kit: So what did you wish for, for your use of Cygnus?

Jordan: Kit, this is, in fact, something that I wish for and created 20 years ago. I told you about this briefly in conversation outside the pod. But I am bringing back Cygnus X 1, the indoor roller coaster that I built in Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 in 2002. Perhaps my finest work of engineering. At this point I had learned you could build roller coasters indoors, so I got to make my own version of Space Mountain basically, except it was even bigger and it was about going into the black hole itself. And yeah, I had flashing lights and yeah, I had the coolest color track, and yeah, there were lots of inversions and yeah, I still think about it 20 years later and I wish it existed. I haven't gone on this new Tron roller coaster that kind of looks like an updated Space Mountain I haven't been on Cosmic Rewind roller coaster, which might be closer to this version in my head than Space Mountain. And I'm glad they are still making space themed roller coasters.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: But before these Tron coasters and Cosmic Rewind coasters had already been invented, I knew Space Mountain needed just a little punch up, you know, just a little bit more danger. So that's what I wish existed and named and themed in Roller coaster Tycoon 2. And to be honest, I haven't come up with anything better since then. So that's my pick to this day.

Kit: Well, you know that it's only a matter of time...

Jordan: before I get hired by Disney imagineering and get to design my own roller coaster based on Cygnus the black hole. Perhaps even link it back to their 1979 IP that they'll have to reboot in order to make this coaster make sense. And only a matter of time before one of our wishes comes true.

Outro

Kit: [Music] This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan.

Kit: Sisters, lovers of stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next week

Kit: On Starry Time. [Music]

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