

Lynx: Myth and Retcons(tellations)

Jordan: Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time, where stars plus lines Plus lines

Kit: equal stories.

Jordan: Today we're going to be continuing our exploration of the constellation Lynx.

Kit: Unlike every other constellation we've covered so far in this podcast, Lynx does not have a Greco Roman myth specifically tied to it because, well, the constellation Lynx as we know it didn't exist.

Jordan: So this episode is going to be a little bit different than our usual episodes. We'll of course, talk about the history of this part of the night sky and how it maps onto other ancient astronomies. But then we're also going to talk about a few Lynx stories and folklores more broadly, and then we'll propose our own myth for this constellation in a new segment we're going to be calling Waxing Poetic. You see what we did there?

Kit: Let's start with what others have seen in this part of the night sky. As we mentioned last week, this constellation is not ancient in origin, and it was introduced by Polish astronomer Johannes Hevelius in 1687.

Jordan: Earlier in the 1600s, it was part of a larger constellation called Jordanus, after

the Jordan River.

Kit: So given this relatively modern origin, it shouldn't be surprising that in ancient Greek star lore this wasn't a constellation. Instead, the stars in this area of the night sky were associated with either Ursa Major or Auriga.

Jordan: And the story is similar for Babylonian star lore as well. This area of the night sky included a number of constellations, including the Crook and the Chariot, which are also associated with Auriga, and the Wagon, which was associated with the main asterism of Ursa Major. But again, no specific different constellation was here.

Kit: In ancient Chinese astronomy, the stars within this constellation Lynx are found in the purple Forbidden enclosure, as well as within the White Tiger of the west and the Vermillion Bird of the south areas.

Jordan: The story goes that Hevelius named the constellation Lynx, or possibly Tiger, because of the faintness of the constellation itself. Only someone with the eyes of a Lynx, he said, could see it,

Kit: Which, maybe, is why we don't see it incorporated into these other, uh, astronomies from antiquity.

Jordan: So we don't really have that dipper shape or really bright stars to anchor onto, and we don't even have a specific myth related to this constellation. But lynxes themselves show up in folklore quite a few times, including an ancient Greek folklore myth. So instead of doing a myth retelling, we're just going to share some of the stories here and wax poetic and create a myth of our own.

Kit: In ancient Greek legend, There were several stories about lynxes. This kind of surprised BoP who investigated further and informed me that there is a species of lynx called the Eurasian Lynx that can be found in Europe, um, including also a subspecies called the Balkan lynx that sometimes found in Greece. So he was surprised, cause he was like, did they have lynxes in Greece?

Jordan: Oh, you betcha they did. And the Iberian peninsula as well. We'll get more into the geographic reach of lynx and the four different subspecies in our creature corner asterism this month, BoP, so stay tuned for that.

Kit: I do love Creature corner. Okay, so this story, however, is about the lynx stone which contended, as the myth went, that the pee of a lynx hardened and turned into a precious star stone, like amber.

Jordan: Ew.

Kit: Yeah. So all these rich ancient Greeks just like wearing lynx pee

Jordan: From the Greco Roman era, we also have a myth documented by Ovid and Metamorphoses about King Lyncus or King Lyncus or King Lyncus I'm gonna go with King Lyncus who was visited by Triptolemus

Kit: And is a Greek hero involved in the Eleusinian Mysteries and is credited for creating agriculture by way of Demeter, who of course is the Olympian goddess of agriculture, agriculture and harvest.

Jordan: Yeah. So Triptolemus is visiting King Lyncus to try to teach his kingdom about

agriculture when King Lyncus becomes jealous of Triptolemus' connection to Demeter and sets about to kill him in his sleep. But before he can kill him, Demeter is like nah, King Lyncus I don't like that. And turns him into a lynx. Why turn him into something as cute as the lynx when he's about to commit a pretty heinous crime? No idea. What does this lynx do later in his life? No idea.

Kit: Yeah, there's not a lot left to the myth, uh, from there, but we also have some notable Greco Roman heroes

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Kit: called Lynceus, including one of the Argonauts who could allegedly see through anything, including skin and the ground. He's also notable for a killing Castor

Jordan: Nice callback, RIP dude bros. Check out our episode on Gemini for more information on Castor and Pollux.

Kit: That's all we really have for Greek myth about lynxes though.

Jordan: So let's move on to where they show up in Norse mythology as they are one of the potential big cats. We don't know exactly which one.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: They were pulling the chariot of Freya, who is the goddess of love, fertility, beauty, war, death and magic.

Kit: Freya has a lot on her plate.

Jordan: A lot on her plate. Lot of jobs you gotta keep up with back then.

Kit: Absolutely. There's also a tradition of stories from Indigenous Peoples of North America which cast the lynx in a variety of roles, from responsible to magical to villainous. But I wasn't really able to find a high quality source on specific myths. Um, I found some, but I couldn't verify them in multiple places. So I'll post what I did find on our socials at StarryTimePod on the Universeodon server of Mastodon for folks who want to learn more and we'll just keep looking to learn more and expand our sources on this topic going forward.

Jordan: Kit, I think we did a great rundown of where lynx show up over the course of human cultural history. But now it's our turn to put ourselves into the story with our proposals for a myth for the constellation Lynx. We'll take a quick break and then return with our newest segment, Waxing Poetic.

Kit: Welcome back to our new segment, Waxing Poetic, where we create our own myths, legends or rationales for constellations in the night sky in hopes of capturing your minds, hearts and very souls. Jordan, would you like to start us off with your waxing Poetic story for lynx?

Jordan: Before I tell you my story about how lynx wound up in the night sky, we have to talk a little bit about this animal, how it lives when it hunts, what it eats. So the lynx diet primarily is rabbits. They comprise 35 to 97% of their diet. Lucky for the lynx, there happens to be a constellation, Lepus, the rabbit, that is currently being chased by the dogs of Orion. What they don't know is that the lynx is what's called an ambush

predator. And so once upon a time, ancient people would observe lynx climbing up tree branches. They would see them jump and they wouldn't land. And they would think maybe they flew. Perhaps they had jumped so far, they had flown into the night sky to chase the rabbit constellation itself. And because of this, because they tried to follow the rabbit into the sky, all cats left here on Earth no longer have the ability to fly. And the poor lynx is trapped forever in the stars, ready to pounce on this rabbit, but stuck, never being able to get it.

Kit: Oh, I like this. I like that it, like, provides an explanation for the, you know, characteristics of both, like, domesticated cats and all other cats. It could be a wild cat, you didn't say, um, and it sort of ties into the narrative and the stars that are already up in the night sky with the hare and the dogs and as well as like the behavior of lynx as an ambush predator. I like that a lot. This is, this checks a lot of boxes.

Jordan: The lynx is up in the north and the hare and the dogs are in the south. So it's like it's perched up in a tree, you know, ready to jump. And it jumps so high it flew into the sky and it's chasing them for all time. And Lynx as a species tend to hunt at twilight when anything is possible. So this part of the night sky, the Lynx constellation, this is their ambush bed. This is where they wait to come back again to finally finish the hunt.

Kit: And the constellation is faint, right, so they're hiding, they're blending in. Oh, all. It all works.

Jordan: Yeah. And I've also looked at some videos of them jumping. They have a huge leap. Alright, Kit, so that was my attempt to try to make a constellation, try to make a story out of this very faint collection of stars. I'd love to hear your myth. Where'd you go for this one?

Kit: So I started off by thinking about where this constellation is found in the night sky. Um, so sort of similar to you, but I was thinking about how it's close to Ursa Major and to Auriga.

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Kit: And in last month's ret-constellation, I made Zeus into the bear of the constellation. And of course in my Podcast Extended Universe, Auriga is the goat charioteer and adopted daughter of Sagittaria, who is my canonical Sagittarius who founded the Amazons. So if you didn't track all of that, then you've got some homework to do in the back catalog.

Jordan: If you don't track that, I'm very disappointed. Challenging, Kit, you're going to try to link all of these retcons together?

Kit: I'm gonna try

Jordan: The Kit Irving Podcast Extended Universe is being pushed to the limits here in season three. I'm excited to see what you come up with next.

Kit: So as we all remember, Zeus has been cast out into the night sky by Hera into the form of Ursa Major, where he sees Auriga and Lyra, uh, returning to the neighboring kingdom after Lyra saves her girlfriend Auriga with her lyre skills. Again, Extended Universe.

Jordan: If you want to know, you can. You have the power.

Kit: Exactly. So Zeus starts trying to communicate with Auriga, spinning a tale of once being a great bear. Right, so lying. Who had been cast into the night sky by the evil father of monsters, Typhon.

Jordan: What? Is that our guy Typhon from season one, episode one. Typhon himself?

Kit: Correct.

Jordan: Damn it's all coming together.

Kit: So Auriga, being a sympathetic sort, is starting to ask, you know, how can she help not knowing of course, that this is Zeus. Unfortunately for Zeus, a lynx witnessed his being cast into the night sky by Hera and Artemis for trying to attack Callisto. The lynx went to Artemis, the goddess of wild animals, and shared its observations. Artemis granted the lynx the power of speech to warn Auriga of Zeus's treachery. So warned Auriga, denied Zeus's efforts and with Artemis's help sent the lynx into the night sky to keep its sharp eyes on Zeus and to prevent his escape.

Jordan: So tricky this Zeus. But you know whose gaze he can't escape? Lynx.

Kit: Mhm

Jordan: Mhm.

Kit: That's right.

Jordan: I'm excited to see if any of the other creatures from into the wilds winds up

making an appearance later this season.

Kit: Me too.

Jordan: me too.

Jordan: I do also want to say Kit, uh, has not listened to the sound of a lynx's voice when she mentions Artemis has and granted the lynx the power of speech. And um, I look forward to talking to her in creature corner as she reconciles what she thinks this speech might sound like.

Kit: I can't wait. So be sure to let us know if you think our versions of a lynx myth should wax

Jordan: shining like the full moon

Kit: or if they should wane.

Jordan: Plunged into the night on a new moon, never to be seen again.

Kit: Now it's time for our segment Oracle AI. This time we asked our oracle to create a short, modern, non problematic myth about the constellation Lynx. Would you please voice the oracle, Jordan?

Jordan: Of course. In a time when the night sky was still being shaped, there was a wise lynx named Lyca. Uh, known for her sharp vision and quiet strength Lyca roamed the Earth, guiding lost travelers through dense forests with her keen eyes and gentle

presence. One fateful night, the stars themselves grew dim and the world was plunged into darkness. Lyca climbed to the highest peak, offering her sight to the heavens so the stars could shine bright again. In gratitude, the sky immortalized her as the Lynx constellation. A reminder that even in silence and shadow, clarity and guidance can always be found.

Kit: So I feel like this sort of makes sense, but also makes no sense.

Jordan: I want to know how the lynx offers their sight to the heaven, so the stars. Because that's like a very simple sentence, but it actually makes no sense.

Kit: It doesn't mean anything.

Jordan: So it's like she was so good at seeing that the stars came back.

Kit: Unclear many interpretations.

Jordan: Does not involve any flying cats, unfortunately. I do like that it is short and non problematic. But I guess it also there's a thin line between short, modern, non problematic and absolute nonsense. Apparently.

Kit: Apparently.

Jordan: But thank you. I think at the end, the reminder is good. Silence and shadow put that on a uh, a label for

Kit: your email signature.

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Jordan: Yes, Yes.

Kit: I mean, it is nonsense, but you didn't need to listen into both seasons of Starry Time to follow it. So maybe it does make it better than mine.

Jordan: At least it wasn't a myth about how great the lynx is at, you know, pissing Amber. That brings us to the end of our episode this week. Please join us next week for the pop culture segment of our exploration of this constellation Lynx.

Kit: This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan,

Kit: sisters who love stars and stories.

Jordan: And we see you next time on

Kit: Starry Time.

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