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[00:00:22] **Jordan:** Hi, I'm Jordan.

[00:00:24] **Kit:** I'm Kit.

[00:00:25] **Jordan:** Welcome to *Starry Time*, where stars plus lines.

[00:00:28] **Kit:** Equal stories.

[00:00:30] **Jordan:** Today we'll be continuing our exploration of the constellation, Cassiopeia.

[00:00:36] **Kit:** Cassiopeia was a queen in Greek mythology, as we'll discuss in great detail today, but other cultures associated this constellation and this part of the night sky with other images and stories.

[00:00:48] **Jordan:** Absolutely. There seem to be a lot of different associations. For example, in Chinese astronomy, the stars of Cassiopeia are spread across three different constellations, which include the Purple Forbidden Enclosure, the Black Tortoise of the North, and the White Tiger of the West.

[00:01:07] **Kit:** In ancient Babylonian astronomy, Cassiopeia was part of the constellation, the Stag, along with the constellation Andromeda.

[00:01:16] **Jordan:** Oh, we're not getting to Andromeda yet.

[00:01:19] **Kit:** The Stag constellation, according to Gavin White's *Babylonian Starlore* book, which I reference quite often, is something of a mystery with not a lot of surviving information. White suggests that it might be related to an Arabian tradition or story.

[00:01:35] **Jordan:** Yes. This idea of the W asterism as an antler creature is also found in other traditions from Northwestern Europe and Siberia that have seen this constellation as an elk or a reindeer.

[00:01:49] **Kit:** In Norse mythology. It's been suggested that this constellation was Ratatoskr, which was a trickster squirrel with horns who liked to mess with the other deities. I had not heard of the trickster squirrel before, but I was very intrigued. Really, there were a lot of other mythologies and histories of this constellation. There's a really great summary on Jodi Voeckler's website. I'll post that in our show notes on our website, starrytimepodcast.com, and on our socials for folks who want to deep dive into the many other stories about this constellation.

[00:02:24] **Jordan:** Well, I don't want to gloss over how well you just pronounce Ratatoskr, the trickster squirrel. I want to give you credit for that. Excellent work.

[00:02:33] **Kit:** Thank you. I practiced.

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[00:02:33] Jordan: You've shown a lot of growth already. Cassiopeia was the queen of Aethiopia, which in the ancient world was in the upper Nile region of ancient Sudan. I just want to note that this Aethiopia is spelled like the modern Ethiopia but with an A at the beginning. I'm not sure if that should change its pronunciation or not.

[00:02:58] Kit: We do hear about Aethiopia and other Greco-Roman stories, including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, we're told that Zeus and company are visiting the land of the Aethiopians. In *The Odyssey*, Poseidon is said to be away in Aethiopia, perhaps during the coming story. Thus Poseidon is too distracted to care about Odysseus in that particular moment.

[00:03:20] Jordan: Poseidon turns out not the hardest guy to distract. Anyways, Queen Cassiopeia, let's talk about her for a while. She's living her life here in Aethiopia. She's married to King Cepheus, who's going to be the subject of next month's Constellation of the Month. They have a daughter, Andromeda, who'll get to dot, dot, dot eventually.

[00:03:43] Kit: All of these stories are interconnected. These three constellations, the story is all interconnected. We're going to be breaking up the stories and focusing on different parts as we move through this set of constellations.

[00:03:55] Jordan: All right. Queen Cassiopeia, she may have been a nymph. She may have been just a regular mortal woman. Anyways, in the myth, she is seen brushing her hair and she's just really digging the way she looks. As she's brushing her hair and feeling herself, she claims, we're not sure to who, but she claims that she is even more beautiful than the Nereids.

[00:04:24] Kit: The Nereids are sea nymphs. Nereid is also a moon of Neptune. The Nereids are said to be the daughters of Nereus, who's a primordial ocean God, is the father, and their mother is the ocean nymph, Doris.

[00:04:40] Jordan: The ocean nymph, Doris?

[00:04:44] Kit: Doris and Nereus had 50 daughters. 5-0 daughters. All of them are Nereids.

[00:04:52] Jordan: Busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. Doris, she's prolific.

[00:04:59] Kit: Yes, they're very busy. Probably the most famous of these Nereids is Thetis, the mother of Achilles. Poseidon's wife is also a Nereid. We're going to do a Nereid's asterism, talking about their mythology and astronomy. I don't want to say much more about them.

[00:05:17] Jordan: I look forward to that. Listeners, be on the lookout for our Nereid asterism coming soon. Basically, Cassiopeia says that she is, in fact, more beautiful than all 50 of these women. As a result of this boastful hubris that she's displayed, the Nereids become enraged and ask Poseidon to punish her. In some accounts, they say he floods the entire country afterwards. Other accounts say that he sends a

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sea monster to destroy Aethiopia. Either way, destruction comes for Cassiopeia and her entire family.

[00:05:58] Kit: There are more granular details about what happens. We'll discuss those again in the next couple of episodes. We'll talk about what happens to Cepheus and Andromeda, but we'll leave the story right there for now, I think.

[00:06:11] Jordan: The myth of Cassiopeia is often wrapped up in the stories of Perseus, who we'll also be discussing this season at a later date. This means the myth itself of Cassiopeia is somewhat flat.

[00:06:24] Kit: Since it's serving more as a way to feature Perseus's so-called "heroics," as opposed, it's not really functioning as a story about actual people.

[00:06:36] Jordan: All the characters in this myth are more or less archetypes.

[00:06:40] Kit: I think the moral is probably one of the clearer ones, which is basically just like, "Don't be vain, be wary of hubris." It's basically just casting these behaviors and characteristics as bad. Is there anything else? I don't know.

[00:06:55] Jordan: No, I think it's a pretty simple one. Not a great one either. It's possible in the case of the flood version that it's also trying to be an explanation for why floods and natural disasters occur, and therefore, it's just myth as response to the natural environment.

[00:07:12] Kit: I think, ultimately, a pretty easy, straightforward one, but I think it's one that definitely needs a right consolation.

[00:07:18] Jordan: Do you want to start with yours first?

[00:07:21] Kit: Yes. Mine's pretty short, to be honest. My first reaction and the one I just stayed with was like, what if we just made the king the one that's vain? Because vanity is so often coded as a negative trait for women. It's something that reinforces this idea that women shouldn't like themselves or how they look. I think this myth would be better if it was about King Cepheus. Maybe he's like, "I'm more handsome than Poseidon." Then Poseidon sends the sea monster. Then maybe the sea monster is like, "You know what, Poseidon? I don't really want to kill this guy because he's probably someone's type and we're all beautiful in our own way."

Then Cetus, who's the sea monster, who we've already talked about and has his own constellation, is just like, "I'm going to go on vacation. I don't really want to be part of this." Then Poseidon and Cepheus both learn and remember that beauty is subjective and being vain is pointless because everybody is beautiful in their own way and everybody is somebody's type. That's what I came up with. It's also not a bad thing to like yourself and like how you look and be proud of yourself. I think so much of the time, we have a persistent message that's like, "Don't like yourself. Don't like how you look. Let's just embrace how we look and let's not get into fights about it."

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[00:08:55] Jordan: My ret-constellation does tie in, of course, to yours a little bit. I have two versions and they're pretty different. In the first one, the story that I want to tell is about a rivalry between these sea gods, Poseidon and Nereus. Neus is supposed to be this sea god who's predated Poseidon or is primordial, however you want to describe it. Anyways, in my retelling, they've known each other their whole life. To them, Cassiopeia is this imaginary ideal that they've been fighting over and had a rivalry with their whole life. What gets placed on the throne here is more a projection of their desire and it's a symbol of how chained they are to their own lust, rather than Cassiopeia being a woman chained for her vanity. My other ret-constellation is a little bit more insidious. I like this one more, in fact. In this reconstella--

[00:10:04] Kit: I was surprised. [laughs]

[00:10:07] Jordan: In this ret-constellation, Cassiopeia and Poseidon are working together. They want to destroy this kingdom because, either they don't believe in Cepheus's ability to rule, or there's a certain degree of corruption here. For some reason or another, Cassiopeia and Poseidon decide, like in *Emperor Palpatine*, *Game of Thrones* shit, to have this unholy alliance in order to create regime change. This whole vanity claim that Cassiopeia makes Poseidon is in on, Nereus is in on, and it's all like this pretense to get the sea god on Cassiopeia's side.

In this version of this story, Cassiopeia is painted vain and willing to be seen as arrogant because, in some sense, it will save her city from some sort of decadence or corruption that Cepheus has been enabling or allowing. In this sense, her vanity or arrogance is more altruistic. It only appears vain on the surface when you don't have the details about why she's willing to be seen this way and why she went to destroy the city.

[00:11:32] Kit: Wow. I do like the idea because so many of these characters are so flat. It's interesting to think about, what if the destruction of this city is necessary in some way, as you said, because of King Cepheus-

[00:11:46] Jordan: If Cassiopeia is in on it.

[00:11:47] Kit: -being evil. Yes, I like that idea. I think it also reminds us of this way in which stories can get told, especially ones like this, where there's no depth. It's like you don't really understand why people are doing what they're doing. They might have a good reason. I think when you add that layer in, it just becomes a more interesting story with more--

[00:12:08] Jordan: No, it's just characters with desires and impetus and motivation. They want things. Just giving it any degree of complexity when you're dealing with stereotypes, archetypes, characters we don't know what they want or why they're doing what they're doing, were my goals with both of these ret-constellations.

[00:12:29] Kit: We have a new segment on our ret-constellations called AI Oracle, where we ask AI, in this case, ChatGPT, to retcon the myth for us. We're like,
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"What's the myth?" This story, I just said, "I would like a contemporary version of this myth, please, AI Oracle," and whoo, the long version of this because Oracle AI just really got rolling here on a tear. It was long. It was probably like a page long. It was too long.

[00:13:09] Jordan: Too long.

[00:13:11] Kit: I said, "Please give me just a one-paragraph version of this story." I'm going to read it to you.

[00:13:18] Jordan: Sometimes you go to the Oracle and they just won't shut up. You're like, 'Can you just give me the synopsis?'

[00:13:24] Kit: They have things to say. [crosstalk] You know the fumes.

[00:13:27] Jordan: Yes, "Just give me the fumes." All right. What's the AI Oracle have to say?

[00:13:30] Kit: All right.

[00:13:31] Jordan: In one paragraph or two or however few you cut it down to.

[00:13:35] Kit: All right. We got it into one paragraph. In the digital realm, Cassiopeia, a famous influencer, reveled in her beauty and superiority. Poseidon, the god of the online domain-

[00:13:53] Jordan: Oh, thanks, ChatGPT.

[00:13:57] Kit: -unleashed a viral sea monster that wreaked havoc on her kingdom. To restore balance, Cassiopeia sacrificed her fame and social media empire. Tech-savvy hero, Perseus, came to her aid."

[00:14:16] Jordan: Brand new sentence. Tech-savvy hero, Perseus.

[00:14:19] Kit: [laughs] "Battling the digital monster and freeing Cassiopeia from her past mistakes." [laughs] There's some more.

[00:14:33] Jordan: It is so nerd.

[00:14:33] Kit: With a newfound understanding of her impact, Cassiopeia rebuilt her online presence-

[00:14:40] Jordan: Oh, did she?

[00:14:41] Kit: -using--" Well, now she's using her influence for positivity, social causes, and genuine connection. "This contemporary retelling explores vanity, redemption, and the responsibility of digital influence in the modern age."

[00:14:59] Jordan: Well, AI Oracle, you didn't miss, I'll give you that much. Nailed it.
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10 out of 10. No, no.

[00:15:05] Kit: It's so bad. It's funny because I feel like the last time we did this, it was good. I was like, "Oh, my gosh." I was like, Wow. Do we even need to write retcons anymore? This one is great." Then this one came along and I was like, "Yikes."

[00:15:23] Jordan: Yikes is right. No, this is good. I don't think I'm ever going to forget Poseidon, the god of the online domain, unleashed a viral sea monster or tech-savvy hero, Perseus. No, this is great.

[00:15:37] Kit: Tech-savvy hero.

[00:15:38] Jordan: I felt the same way as you did after the first one we did with the AI Oracle. I was like, "Should I just use this every time? Because this is better than anything that I came up with." Now, we see the Oracle 2 is fallible, that if humans put just a little bit of thought and effort into the myths that we tell each other, we will be able to outwit, outthink the AI Oracle's best ways of making these myths contemporary. That brings us to the end of our episode this week. Join us next week for our pop culture segment of our exploration of this constellation, Cassiopeia.

[00:16:19] Kit: This has been Kit.

[00:16:21] Jordan: And Jordan.

[00:16:21] Kit: Sisters, lovers of stars and stories.

[00:16:25] Jordan: We'll see you next time.

[00:16:27] Kit: On *Starry Time*.

[music]

[00:16:50] [END OF AUDIO]