

[music]

[00:00:16] **Jordan Tierney:** Hi, I'm Jordan.

[00:00:18] **Kit Irving:** I'm Kit.

[00:00:19] **Jordan:** Welcome to *Starry Time*, where stars plus lines--

[00:00:24] **Kit:** Equal stories.

[00:00:26] **Jordan:** Today we're exploring the myth of the constellation, Centaurus, the centaur.

[00:00:32] **Kit:** Not all cultures saw this as a centaur in the night sky. Instead, in Babylonian star lore, this constellation was known as Bison Man.

[00:00:42] **Jordan:** I can see that.

[00:00:43] **Kit:** It's almost so close that you might think that the Greeks didn't completely 100% come up with this by themselves.

[00:00:54] **Jordan:** Oh, are you saying the Greeks may have appropriated this from an earlier culture and then retconned it to fit their own needs?

[00:01:02] **Kit:** I'm just noticing.

[00:01:05] **Jordan:** Are you accusing our guy, Ptolemy, of plagiarism?

[00:01:08] **Kit:** Claudius?

[00:01:09] **Jordan:** Claudius? Our Claudius? Never.

[00:01:12] **Kit:** Never.

[00:01:14] **Jordan:** In Chinese astronomy, this area of the night sky is across two of the four symbols, the azure dragon of the east, and the vermilion bird of the south. Some of the stars in this constellation are found in the southern asterisms area, which describes the southern areas of the night sky that were not visible to China, that were added to traditional Chinese astronomy in the 16th century after contact with European astronomers by the Chinese astronomer/agronomist/mathematician/politician/writer, Xu Guangqi. I'm doing my best to pronounce that, but please, if you have more information, let us know.

[00:02:00] **Kit:** According to Judy Volker's website, in Hawaii, Alpha and Beta Centauri are called the first and last miale or maile, I'm not sure, but it's a vine that's used in traditional lays. There were also a number of other interpretations and stories about this constellation from Polynesia and Australia. I'll be sure to post that site over on our socials once our episode comes out for folks who want to learn more.

[00:02:24] Jordan: Okay, Kit, let's do a deeper dive into the Greco-Roman myth about Centaurus. As we mentioned last episode, Centaurus is not the only centaur in the night sky. The myth of Sagittarius, which we discussed in season one, also involves a centaur. Who's this guy? Who is this centaur? Most stories agree the centaur is named Chiron.

[00:02:49] Kit: Though some versions of the Sagittarius myth also cast that centaur as Chiron as well. We did plan ahead, passed us, we were really together, because we chose to focus only on the myth of Croto in that season one episode on Sagittarius.

[00:03:05] Jordan: You'll want to listen to that one for sure, because I think it's a place where Kit's podcast extended mythoverse starts to find its wings, starts to really begin.

[00:03:16] Kit: Love you, Sagittaria.

[00:03:18] Jordan: Before we get into Chiron, Kit, do you want to give us a brief reminder of the Greco-Roman myth of centaurs broadly?

[00:03:26] Kit: Happy to. In Greek and Roman mythology, centaurs have the upper body of a human and the legs and lower body of a horse. There are however a few different origins stories about centaurs broadly, and one is related to Ixion and Nephele.

[00:03:43] Jordan: Nephele, that sounds familiar. Didn't we discuss Nephele in our Aries episode?

[00:03:48] Kit: That's right. Nephele is the mother of the twins that fly the golden ram, Chrysollos, and saved them from their evil stepmother.

[00:03:57] Jordan: This is all lore that you can catch up on in our full episode from season one.

[00:04:04] Kit: This story involving Nephele precedes the birth of her twins. In this story, Nephele essentially turns herself into a Hera duplicate to help Zeus catch King Ixion in his lustful wishes to get with Hera.

[00:04:23] Jordan: Big no-no.

[00:04:25] Kit: There's a little bit more to Ixion's story, but for now we can just leave it at he slept with Nephele as Hera.

[00:04:32] Jordan: Big no-no.

[00:04:34] Kit: Just don't want to do that. From this union, one story says she birthed the centaurs. Other story, however, says that she had two human children, one of whom went on to mate with some horses. That's where the centaurs came

from.

[00:04:51] Jordan: Think I prefer the former. Sometimes it does surprise me that we still tell Greek myths to children.

[00:04:59] Kit: There are also stories of other tribes of centaurs fathered by Zeus, so there might be multiple different origin stories. By and large, centaurs are seen in the Greco-Roman mythology as wild and warfaring. I think that's probably all we really need to get ready to understand the context of this myth. Do you want to tell us more about Chiron, the centaur of this specific constellation?

[00:05:27] Jordan: Of course. Unsurprisingly, the centaur, Chiron, is known as the wisest and justest of all centaurs, as stated by our friend, Homer, from the *Iliad*. Chiron is notably different from other centaurs with a different origin story. As a result, he defied the usual characteristics that we described before of centaurs as wild and untamed.

[00:05:52] Kit: This is really something. In some representations of Chiron, you know that it's him and not some other centaur because he has the front legs and upper body of a human, as opposed to the traditional upper/lower split discussed previously.

[00:06:10] Jordan: I made the mistake of thinking about that image for longer than a second. Do not make that mistake. Chiron is said to be the son of Cronus, aka Zeus's OG bad daddy. When he took horse form, pause, and slept with Oceanid Philyra. Oops, our good friend, Cronus, gets caught by his wife mid act, and turned into a human form partway through in an attempt to escape.

[00:06:45] Kit: Sure. I guess the good thing about this story is that I think it really provides us some context about why Zeus is the way that he is.

[00:06:56] Jordan: The crab apple doesn't fall far from the Cronus tree. Anyways, beautiful imagery. Philyra didn't really want anything to do with Chiron after giving birth to him, so he was primarily raised by Apollo, son of Zeus and the god of archery, music, healing, the sun, poetry, and so on.

[00:07:19] Kit: Apollo also has a lot of jobs.

[00:07:22] Jordan: I think just people had more jobs back then.

[00:07:25] Kit: Lots of slashes.

[00:07:26] Jordan: Chiron is said to be the mentor of a variety of Greek heroes, including Jason, Argonauts, ever heard of him, golden fleece, gotta catch it, as well as Achilles - oops, my ankle - and Asclepius, who we discussed in our episode on Ophiuchus.

[00:07:45] Kit: Ophiuchus is the 13th zodiac sign and the final episode of season

one.

[00:07:50] Jordan: Exactly. Our guy, Chiron, mentored heroes, and is said to have also invented medicine and surgery.

[00:07:58] Kit: We put him in the night sky for just being a stand-up centaur. That's nice. This is nice.

[00:08:06] Jordan: Kit, we're in season three. By now, you know, there needs to be something tragic that goes on here.

[00:08:13] Kit: Oh, we can't just have put him up there because he was a good centaur?

[00:08:17] Jordan: A certain level of tragedy must be reached. Anyways, for some reason or another, either in a skirmish with other centaurs or by accident, Hercules hits or maybe scraped Chiron with an arrow he has dipped in hydra blood. As we all know, hydra blood is pretty, pretty deadly. Except for the case of immortals like Chiron. Rather than dying due to his injury, it's somehow even worse. Chiron being immortal has to deal with that excruciating pain from the hydra blood, and just live in agony.

[00:08:56] Kit: Hercules is just such a tough hang. Just so tough.

[00:09:00] Jordan: Just should have focused on what he was good at. Despite Chiron's skill in healing, he can't actually do anything here to improve the quality of his life. Thanks again, Hercules. Eventually, he decides that the suffering is too much to bear and he seeks an audience with Zeus. During this meeting, Chiron asked to trade his immortality to free Prometheus.

[00:09:26] Kit: I'm not totally clear on how Chiron and Prometheus know each other, but for those who aren't familiar, Prometheus is the god who gave humans fire, maybe even created humanity from clay in defiance of Zeus and co. For his trouble and faith in humanity, Zeus sentenced Prometheus to be chained to a rock where an eagle came every day and ate his liver. Because Prometheus, also like Chiron, is immortal, he didn't die. The liver just grew back and then the bird came back and ate it again. Literally one of my nightmares.

[00:10:06] Jordan: I got to give them more credit. The Greek myth certainly have a flair for the recurring nightmares. Anyways, for some unclear reason, Zeus agrees, all right, sounds like a fair trade to me. Maybe he's just in a trading kind of mood that day. Doesn't make a lot of sense to me, but if I know anything about the Greek gods, they can be pretty moody and pretty fickle, and pretty petty, and their decision-making, I wouldn't say is always consistent.

The story goes, Chiron finally is released from this prison of pain and is allowed to die. Prometheus, as part of the trade, is freed, and Zeus put Chiron in the night sky as Centaurus, or Sagittarius, to honor his sacrifice. Turning to our myth analysis, the

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concept of myths about centaurs as a mythological creature has been proposed to be the result of contact between ancient Minoan and cultures of people that rode horses. You can imagine, if you'd never seen a person on a horseback, and those people were different from you with different languages and customs, you might end up thinking they were an entire species entirely and then you end up with the centaur myth.

[00:11:23] Kit: Definitely, which makes these mythological creatures just another in the list of myths used to explain things that are new and different.

[00:11:30] Jordan: Stories of human-animal hybrids also seem to exist to explain the boundaries between humanity and wilderness, way to compare, contrast, and understand that there is an interrelationship and an interplay between these constructed opposites.

[00:11:47] Kit: Shifting to Chiron himself, I think this character actually serves a few different purposes. He's first a mythical mentor, which lends credibility and prestige to those "heroes". It's not just that they were demigods in the case of Achilles or Hercules, but they also have this tutelage of this wise and powerful god who is a lot more accessible in a way than the Olympians are.

[00:12:12] Jordan: Chiron, despite his immortality, he seems much more connected to the human experience than say a Zeus or an Apollo would be. This idea of a human ally is further ingrained in his role as a healer, as well as a doctor, the founder of surgery. Obviously, gods don't need those things, but they can be the difference between life and death for us humans.

[00:12:37] Kit: Chiron's also providing a mythical explanation for healing, recovery from illness, connecting those things to divine rather than to the chance or to science.

[00:12:47] Jordan: The myth specifically of Chiron's eventual death also points to the limitations of medicine and the healing arts, even for the gods and the immortals. Some things will always be inevitable, for humans at least.

[music]

[00:13:11] Kit: Welcome back to our segment, Retcons(tellation). In this segment, we re-imagine, reboot, and revise the myths of our monthly constellation in hopes of modernizing, subverting, or deepening the story of our constellation of the month. Sometimes, though, we're just trying to make them a little less cringy. Do you want to start us off this week, Jordan? I know you said you'd been working on your retcons, so I'm excited to hear it.

[00:13:35] Jordan: In a land far away from Greece live a civilization of centaurs, centaur cities and towns, and folklore living happily, minding their own business, until eventually, after years of building their civilization, an earthquake happens and it wipes out their natural habitat. They are forced to roam for thousands and thousands

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of years looking for a home, but they develop an ability to tell when earthquakes and natural disasters are going to happen.

Meanwhile, back in Greece, at an oracle, the aftereffects of a nearby earthquake are felt and a prophecy is made that their great city will be soon destroyed by a thundering mass. In the course of their migrations, the centaurs eventually start to settle along the Greek countryside. The Greeks had never met centaurs before and were pretty terrified of them, especially the sounds of their thundering herds as they moved. Superstitions about centaurs began to begin, that they were stupid and cruel, and that their horde would eventually be the thundering mass that led to the downfall of their city.

People feared them and hated them, and eventually the animosity had reached a breaking point. Centaurs were being removed from Greece forcefully. However, despite their cruel treatment at the hands of the Greeks, the centaurs tried their very best to show them that they were healers, that they weren't the warlike beings that the myths and superstitions around them had become. They tried to show them that, yes, they were different, but they would not be the cause of their downfall.

The Greeks refused to believe them. Eventually, they rounded up all the centaurs they could find, and they stomped and stomped in anger and fear, screaming at the Greeks for imprisoning them. While they were in this large mass together, they were able to pick up on the signs of an incoming earthquake, one very much like the one that had destroyed their civilization. Due to their strength and numbers, they were able to finally convince one of the Greeks to just listen to them, to let them know that an earthquake was coming, that their downfall was coming.

The Greeks refused to believe them. Without much time passing, soon an avalanche began to thunder down the mountain, first slamming into the Greek towers and then slamming into the Greek cities, and eventually breaking in to the fort that kept the centaurs imprisoned, allowing them to be freed. Instead of leaving the Greeks to their rubble, they decided to help them and decided to heal the ones they found who had been hurt, and show them the ways to predict what natural disasters could come next. The Greeks, after learning their lesson from this disaster, began to value the centaurs and became to trust their judgment, eventually putting one up in the night sky for all the hard work that they did to help each other.

[00:17:25] Kit: I like that. I feel like the centaurs are better people than I am. I'd be like, smell you all later, once I was freed. I appreciate that they're committed to their values, not just when it's convenient, but all the time, which is often difficult to do. It's a word of caution about treating people who are different than us as bad, or vilifying people or creatures that are different than us without really seeing their worth, without getting to know them, without being welcoming.

[00:17:58] Jordan: How about you, Kit? Where did you decide to go at this one?

[00:18:02] Kit: I didn't do quite as good of a job. I have a couple of options, but really they're sticking with the Chiron theme that we talked about before, so I like yours
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better already. Honestly, this myth, I think the reason I struggled with it is that there's not really a lot of there there, I guess. First, I'd like to know more about Chiron in terms of his teaching of heroes. I want to know that he taught them not how to fight or whatever he's teaching them, because we don't know.

It seems like he should be teaching them how to be wise and just, and how to heal, but none of them are doing that. I want him to be more of a violence as a last resort kind of teacher who serves as a role model for his mentees about how to treat people more equitably and how to focus on helping rather than destroying and fighting. Actually help those heroes become wise and kind rather than just scary, brutal and dumb. I'd like to change that.

[00:19:04] Jordan: Slow clap. [claps] As far as retcons(tellations) go, mine was a bit more macro. We're focusing in on this story itself. There is certainly a misallocation of the teachings.

[00:19:17] Kit: My second retcon, again, just more in the deepening of the story, is thinking about what happens after Chiron dies. I think there's a few options. Maybe Zeus goes back on his word and doesn't release Prometheus and that leads to a human uprising, maybe led by Hercules or the other heroes who worked with Chiron. That's one option. Another option is maybe Prometheus is released and then returns to his role as human protector enabler and helps guide them towards a path that overthrows the Olympian, and is more peaceful as a society.

I guess I'm just trying to turn the end of this myth into something less cliffhanger-y, something that has a little more depth of meaning, because right now it's just like Prometheus comes back, but then what? I don't know. Chiron dies, and what? That's what I'm thinking about how I would want to deepen this myth a bit more.

[00:20:15] Jordan: We also don't understand what Chiron's relationship to Prometheus even is. Why does he want to free this guy in the first place? What's their extended universe? What's their lore? Are they old friends or is it just convenient? There's all these details. The third act, that's the problem. First two acts, noble centaur, great. Even the get hit with the hydra blood arrow, you can still resolve that a lot of ways that are going to be meaningful. I love both of these retcons(tellations) because they do the goal. They deepen the story. Okay, Kit, now it's time to see where our oracle, not the one in my myth, but our oracle AI has decided to take this myth.

[00:21:03] Kit: First we asked the oracle to summarize the myth and identify key problematic themes. The themes identified by the oracle included, one, immortal suffering as punishment for innocence. Basically, Hercules is the worst. Violence and collateral damage. Again, boo Hercules.

[00:21:24] Jordan: Room for improvement.

[00:21:25] Kit: Three, the role of sacrifice.

[00:21:27] Jordan: Whether you like it or not.

[00:21:29] Kit: Four, portrayal of centaurs and other nonhuman beings, essentially the way that Chiron's exceptionalism reinforces negative centaur propaganda.

[00:21:38] Jordan: Actually, pretty perceptive, AI.

[00:21:40] Kit: Five, divine inequity, especially in how people's actions are or are not punished by Zeus.

[00:21:47] Jordan: A few of those, I wouldn't even have thought of myself. There were some obvious ones that it got, which I was happy to see as well.

[00:21:54] Kit: Then we asked the oracle to provide a short, one-paragraph retelling of the constellation that subverted these problematic elements and modernized the myth. Would you be willing to voice the oracle, Jordan?

[00:22:06] Jordan: Of course. So sayeth the oracle. In a modern retelling of Chiron's myth, the wise centaur still mentors heroes, but teaches them compassion and responsibility, alongside strength. When Heracles accidentally wounds Chiron with the poisoned arrow, Chiron uses his deep knowledge of medicine to temporarily stabilize himself, not to escape suffering, but to guide Heracles in understanding the consequences of his recklessness.

Rather than succumbing to endless pain, Chiron negotiates with the gods to create a sanctuary where all beings, mortal and immortal, can find respite from suffering, blending his immortality with his healing powers to benefit not just him, but others. Prometheus, inspired by Chiron's compassion, willingly joins him in the sanctuary, transforming it into a haven where divine and mortal conflicts can be reconciled. Instead of being immortalized as a constellation, Chiron becomes a symbol of restorative justice, teaching that even in a world of chaos, wisdom and care can forge enduring peace.

[00:23:21] Kit: I can't be too mad because I made similar suggestions about changing Chiron's teachings, which makes me feel like the oracle is stealing from me, but this isn't too bad. It took some turns I did not expect, but I'm also unclear about how Prometheus escaped his eagle liver-eating rock punishment. I'm a little confused about how this is restorative justice a little bit. It's not the worst one that we've had, but--

[00:23:58] Jordan: Still a little contaminated with artificial and artificial intelligence.

[00:24:02] Kit: That's right.

[00:24:03] Jordan: I love this idea of a safe space for mortals and immortals. Great job. Again, the oracle AI keeps missing this basic question of how does it become a constellation? Then the last line is it does not become a constellation.

[laughter]

[00:24:25] **Kit:** A-plus.

[00:24:26] **Jordan:** Which is an interesting note.

[00:24:28] **Kit:** To be fair, we don't really name new constellations these days, so it's very modern.

[00:24:35] **Jordan:** That is very modern. Excellent. Great point. Sorry, oracle AI. I won't question you again.

[music]

[00:24:48] **Jordan:** That brings us to the end of our episode this week. Join us next week for the pop culture segment of our exploration of the constellation, Centaurus.

[00:24:59] **Kit:** This has been Kit.

[00:25:01] **Jordan:** And Jordan.

[00:25:02] **Kit:** Sisters that love stars and stories.

[00:25:06] **Jordan:** We'll see you next time.

[00:25:08] **Kit:** On *Starry Time*.

[music]

[00:25:30] **[END OF AUDIO]**