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[00:00:14] **Jordan Tierney:** Hi, I am Jordan.

[00:00:16] **Kit Irving:** I'm Kit.

[00:00:17] **Jordan:** Welcome to *Starry Time*, where stars plus lines.

[00:00:21] **Kit:** Equals stories.

[00:00:22] **Jordan:** Today, we're exploring the myths of the constellation Sagitta, the Arrow.

[00:00:27] **Kit:** As we discussed in the last episode, Sagitta is a small constellation that seems an afterthought, but that's not so in Babylonian star lore. Instead, in Gavin White's book *Babylonian Star-Lore*, it's proposed that the stars of Sagitta were representing the Dead Man. Dead Man in Sumerian and Mesopotamian mythology seemed to be some kind of demon that's associated with stone. Either it is a stone or is stone crushed by Zababa or has a stone army who's destroyed by Ninurta. Something about stone, made of stone, army of stone, crushed stone.

Gavin White also discusses how this figure of a dead man is thought of as a person being carried away by an Anzu bird, which is where the eagle or Aquila in the IAU Greco-Roman terms comes into play. We've already talked about Aquarius, too, which is also an eagle.

[00:01:21] **Jordan:** That's when we met our sweet, sweet friend, baby Ganymede.

[00:01:25] **Kit:** There's this thought that maybe this idea of a dead man being carried by an eagle becomes this story of our sweet, sweet Ganymede being carried away by eagle Zeus. Ew.

[00:01:36] **Jordan:** I can see it. I can see how one led to the other. It's an intriguing theory. Be sure to check out Season 1's episode on Aquarius for more of the ew and ick factor of Ganymede. This is just another great reminder of how a lot of the Greco-Roman constellations have been predated by other myths, then have been reshaped, refashioned, and adapted from these earlier myths and stories into what we know of them in the Greek myths.

[00:02:04] **Kit:** Yes, for sure.

[00:02:05] **Jordan:** In traditional Chinese astronomy, the contemporary stars of Sagitta fall mostly within the Left Flag asterism within the Ox mansion in the Black Tortoise of the North area of the night sky. At least one star is found in the Left Wall asterism within the Purple Forbidden Enclosure Mansion of the night sky.

[00:02:26] **Kit:** Definitely not a one-to-one Sagitta-is-this-exact-thing in Chinese astronomy, for sure. Honestly, I wasn't really able to find out too much more about other cultures' star lore, aside from Greco-Roman myths. If anybody else out there knows other myths about the arrow constellation, be sure to let us know over on our socials.

[00:02:45] Jordan: Luckily for us, there are at least three different possible Greco-Roman myths that have been associated with Sagitta.

[00:02:51] Kit: Unluckily for us, two of them involve Hercules, and those are both terrible for different reasons, in my opinion.

[00:02:58] Jordan: Walk us through it.

[00:02:59] Kit: I'm going to start us off with the non-Hercules myth, which features the one and the only Apollo, the Greek and Roman fraternal twin of Artemis, who presides over archery, music, prophecy, healing, the sun, and so on and so forth.

[00:03:13] Jordan: I got to give Apollo credit. He's got a diverse catalog of interests here.

[00:03:19] Kit: Definitely, and he is one of the very few gods that retains his name in the Roman mythos. I don't know how impressed to be with all of these multi-hyphenates of Apollo because I feel like everybody we've talked about on this podcast has done like 700 jobs.

[00:03:34] Jordan: I'm impressed by all of them, which also makes me impressed by none of them. It's still actually TBD if we'll be impressed with Apollo in this story, where he murders the Cyclopes.

[00:03:46] Kit: Wait, he didn't kill the Cyclopes?

[00:03:48] Jordan: Well, Kit, that's a different tribe of Cyclopes. In fact, there are at least three different groups, including, of course, our guy Polyphemus, who is blinded by Nobody or No Man from *The Odyssey*. Then there are the Cyclopes, who were said to have built the walls of Mycenae and Tiryns. There's also then a third set of giant one-eyed creatures, a set of brothers known as Brontes, Steropes, and Arges. These three are known as the Homeric Cyclopes, the wall builders, and the Hesiodic, which are the ones we'll be discussing today.

[00:04:24] Kit: This last set is probably after Hesiod's *Theogony*, I'm guessing.

[00:04:28] Jordan: Oh, precisely, Kit. According to Hesiod, these three Cyclopes were the sons of Uranus and Gaia. They've been around for a minute, and their names actually translate to thunder, lightning, and bright.

[00:04:42] Kit: Oh, I think I know where this one is going.

[00:04:44] Jordan: According to Hesiod and Apollodorus, the poor Cyclopes were imprisoned by Uranus.

[00:04:51] Kit: Who, frankly, is just one in a truly long succession of bad dads, since Uranus is the father of Cronus, who is the father of Zeus.

[00:05:00] Jordan: Just like a bad dad carousel. While Cronus pretty much ignored his brothers, the Cyclopes, Zeus freed them, which resulted in a deal where they would make some thunderbolts for him.

[00:05:13] Kit: This must be in the pre-Hephaestus era since Hephaestus is Zeus and Hera's child. We needed to get Zeus thunderbolts before Hephaestus, I guess.

[00:05:22] Jordan: Yes. Hephaestus, he comes in. He invents the Model T. He's got a whole new assembly line thing, and it's great. Some versions also indicate that after Hephaestus comes along, the brothers would also help and act as his assistants.

[00:05:38] Kit: Other than helping Zeus become lord of lightning, do we know why Apollo killed the brother?

[00:05:44] Jordan: They're encroaching on his territory. No. Do we really know why anyone kills anyone in Greek mythology?

[00:05:51] Kit: Well, if Zeus is involved, it usually has Zeus sleeping with somebody else and Hera killing them.

[00:05:56] Jordan: Oh, yes, an affair with Zeus. Yes. Great guess, but no, it's option 2, revenge.

[00:06:02] Kit: Close.

[00:06:02] Jordan: Yes, close. Those are the two top options. Apparently, the Cyclopes killed Apollo's son, Asclepius.

[00:06:10] Kit: Wait, we've talked about Asclepius already in our Ophiuchus episode. I remember him going to live with Chiron, bringing people back to life, then being killed, and then turned into a god. I thought Zeus killed him to make Hades less whiny. Wasn't that the whole thing? Not these--

[00:06:28] Jordan: We have to remember the famous adage, Kit. Why hate the murderer when you can hate the weapon?

[00:06:34] Kit: There was, "I killed your Cyclops" thing, which somehow makes Zeus change his mind and then turn Zeus's son into a god. I need to go, I guess, re-listen to that episode. [laughs]

[00:06:46] Jordan: The arrow is said to be used by Apollo to kill these Cyclopes.

[00:06:51] Kit: All right. I'm not sure where I fall on Apollo based on that myth. The second myth that we have is also a replay from a previous episode. It's said that this constellation represents the arrow Hercules used to kill the scary flesh-eating birds with the metal wings, the bronze beaks, and the poison poop.

[00:07:11] Jordan: I noticed you left it up to me to pronounce the Stymphalian birds, which was one of Hercules's labor. In fact, the sixth labor is to kill these scary flesh-eating birds with metal wings, bronze beaks, and poison poop, which, of course, were pets of Artemis. She's got great taste. We did get some assistance from Athena on this one, which you can hear in our Hercules episode. In the end, like all the labors, he did pass the test.

[00:07:39] Kit: This is the rare occasion where I'm cheering for Hercules because I

think these are nightmare birds.

[00:07:44] Jordan: For you, maybe.

[00:07:46] Kit: Exactly, for me.

[00:07:47] Jordan: For you, sure. For me, scary flesh-eating birds with metal wings, bronze beaks, and poison poop sounds like the natural evolution of sentient beings on Earth. I'm actually disappointed Hercules was so successful. The final myth about this stray arrow also features Hercules, who is engaging in a little revisionist history to build up his hero points.

[00:08:08] Kit: Not Hercules. We know he'll just somehow blame Hera if he's caught in his lie. I guess it's fine.

[00:08:12] Jordan: It's very convenient. Yes, in this version of the myth, Sagitta is the arrow that Hercules used to free Prometheus, who is, of course, a Titan who gave humans fire and was chained to a rock to have his liver eaten daily by an eagle for eternity.

[00:08:31] Kit: Here's the revisionist history because in our Myths and Re-constellations episode for the constellation Centaurus, we learned that Chiron, the centaur in question, traded his life for Prometheus's life, thereby earning a place in the night sky.

[00:08:44] Jordan: Perhaps Hercules was engaging in a little revisionist history because he's a little embarrassed since, as we all know, in fact, he is the one who poisoned Chiron accidentally with Hydra blood.

[00:09:01] Kit: Hercules is always falling upward, always.

[00:09:04] Jordan: What a guy.

[00:09:05] Kit: Certainly a guy.

[00:09:06] Jordan: One we've talked about and analyzed in our prior episodes.

[00:09:11] Kit: Though it is interesting, in this case, we're just getting acts of Hercules's heroism without all the underpinning about why he's confronting the angry flesh-eating birds, which was, again, because he murdered his wife and children.

[00:09:24] Jordan: Hera made him do it, Kit, drove him insane, murders his wife and kids. Who else is he going to take it out on but the angry flesh-eating birds?

[00:09:34] Kit: As we talked about in that episode on Hercules, his is ultimately a story about redemption. These stories here are just isolated, much like the arrow constellation itself.

[00:09:44] Jordan: We can see that Apollo myth functions in a slightly different way, but also has that main theme of vengeance and justice in an arrow correcting previous wrongs. He kills the Cyclopes for their indirect role in creating the weapons that Zeus used to kill one of his sons, Asclepius. It's interesting to me that we see

Apollo just doing the old eye-for-an-eye thing, given the use of trials and similar processes. They were pretty normative in ancient Greek society to deal with murder. This could also be another way of emphasizing the difference between gods and mortals. Mortals may always want that revenge, but they aren't gods. They don't have magic arrows, so they can't go about things in that way.

[00:10:29] Kit: I also think this story's focus on going after the maker of the weapons is simultaneously convoluted, sensible, and weirdly modern. On the one hand, you can't attack Zeus directly if you're Apollo, so you can attack the Cyclopes. It's a little convoluted in going about that revenge, but it raises that question of who is to blame when weapons are used to do harm. It's a very modern question.

[00:10:52] Jordan: Easily a question that we can see integrated into stories that are being written today, though maybe not for the same reason as the original myth.

[00:11:00] Kit: Agreed. Let's take a quick break and then see if either of our re-constellations can pick up these themes, or maybe we're just going to go a totally different way.

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[00:11:19] Jordan: Welcome back to our segment, Re-constellation. In this segment, we reimagine, reboot, and revise the myths of our monthly constellation in hopes to modernize, subvert, or deepen the story of our monthly constellation, or sometimes we just try to make them a little bit less cringey. Do you want to start us off, Kit?

[00:11:39] Kit: Yes. I was thinking a lot about arrows in general when thinking about re-constellation in this myth, and my first thought was that there's other Greco-Roman mythological characters, whether they're gods or heroes, that would just be more interesting and are associated with arrows already. A story about Cupid or Eros, that would be interesting. A story about Artemis, who's famously a hunter, as opposed to Apollo, who is not, or the hero Atalanta. My first proposal is just pick literally anybody else from your mythos to write this story about who's actually associated with arrows.

[00:12:12] Jordan: Excellent, just reframe the myth. We have other figures here who use arrows.

[00:12:19] Kit: Then this got me thinking about other archers in more contemporary fiction. If we really wanted to modernize, maybe we go with Kate Bishop.

[00:12:28] Jordan: New Hawkeye, hopefully?

[00:12:30] Kit: Yes, or Merida from *Brave* or Robin Hood. This was my favorite suggestion, which was just go Legolas.

[00:12:37] Jordan: It's time for some modern constellations. Get Tolkien in the night sky. He's got some Apollo vibes to him.

[00:12:45] Kit: Why not? Let's just get Greek about this, co-opt the stories of the night sky into contemporary stories. Honestly, what I did think was once we finish the

88 constellations, we should try to turn the current constellations into a cohesive story of *The Lord of the Rings* with current or reimagined constellations. I feel like there's a lot of content there that we could work with.

[00:13:08] Jordan: Kit, I'm here for it, absolutely. We're just part of a long tradition, as the Anzu bird in Babylonian star lore got retranslated into the myths of Sagitta. Now we are just finding our place by reimagining these constellations with a more modern fictional context.

[00:13:29] Kit: Either way, what I'm really trying to get at here is the idea of an arrow being associated with Hercules or even Apollo is boring, and I want to associate it with another, more interesting character, either from Greek myth who's maybe underrepresented in the night sky, or someone from contemporary fiction who's new and exciting. That's what I would do. I didn't have a specific myth, just general thoughts on what to do. How about you, Jordan? Where did you go with this re-constellation?

[00:13:56] Jordan: Our good friend Mulan. My final vote is for a Mulan constellation.

[00:14:01] Kit: I think just overall pick a new archer is the takeaway here.

[00:14:06] Jordan: Okay, Kit. Now it's time to see where our oracle took this myth in our segment, Oracle AI.

[00:14:12] Kit: First, we asked the oracle what the most popular Sagitta myth was, and it answered in the Hercules revisionist history where Hercules releases Prometheus.

[00:14:22] Jordan: Oracle, I'm beginning to think maybe we shouldn't indulge the Oracle AI. Obviously, right now, this is Chiron erasure. Remember Chiron?

[00:14:34] Kit: Yes. Anyways, the themes that the oracle identified in this myth included liberation and defiance, redemption and mercy, divine authority versus mortal morality." Choice of words. Transformation through suffering, heroism, and sacrifice, which is interesting because the oracle claims that Hercules gets nothing out of this deal, but we know the truth. Then we asked for a one-paragraph myth about the constellation Sagitta that modernizes the myth that it thinks is the most common one and updates problematic elements. Would you kindly give voice to the oracle, Jordan?

[00:15:10] Jordan: This is one of my favorites in a little while. I'm just going to say that I will keep the rest of the auditory commentary to myself. Sayeth the oracle, "In a world not unlike our own, a brilliant scientist named Theo was imprisoned by a powerful global council for sharing a limitless energy source with the people, defying their control. Each day, a drone drained his life force to power the council's elite cities, while the world watched unaware of his suffering. One night, a young activist named Hera launched a silent arrow from a remote mountain, a coded signal that shut down the drone and freed Theo.

Rather than celebrate her act of rebellion, she chose anonymity, saying the arrow's purpose was justice, not fame. The arrow itself was immortalized in the stars as

Sagitta, a symbol of quiet resistance, the courage to challenge unjust power, and the belief that even small, precise actions can pierce." See what you did there, oracle. Great cruelty.

[00:16:34] Kit: Does it make sense? No. Do I like it? Yes. My favorite part is that the protagonist is named Hera. [chuckles] Why? I don't know, but I love it. Oracle, just wow, really, you got me. Really got me.

[00:16:52] Jordan: The inexplicable choice of Theo is engaging, really drew me in. I also love the idea of a silent arrow with a coded signal. Theo, Hera, you might not be the heroes we need, but you are the heroes we deserve. This 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 Sagitta.

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[00:17:32] Kit: This has been Kit.

[00:17:33] Jordan: And Jordan.

[00:17:35] Kit: Sisters who love stars and stories.

[00:17:38] Jordan: We'll see you next time.

[00:17:40] Kit: On *Starry Time*.

[music]

[00:18:02] [END OF AUDIO]