

## SPASH ASTRONOMY

### Week 7: Orion, Canis Major, Canis Minor, Gemini, Taurus

Orion was a powerful figure - strong, handsome and possessing great prowess as a hunter. Whilst visiting the isle of Chios, he fell in love with Merope, a granddaughter of the god Dionysis. Her father, Oenopion, agreed to their marriage on condition that Orion first rid the island of all dangerous beasts. This he did, but Oenopion made further excuses as to why the marriage should not take place. An exasperated Orion drank a great deal of potent wine and, under its influence, forced himself on Merope. Oenopion was furious at this attack on his daughter and, whilst Orion was still drunk and helpless, blinded him. Orion sought the assistance of an oracle and was told that he had to travel to the East to seek the Sun's morning rays in order to recover his sight. After many adventures, including a meeting with Vulcan, blacksmith to the gods, on the island of Lemnos, he finally met the Sun god Helios and was given back his sight. Now all his thoughts were of revenge, but on his way to seek out Oenopion, he landed in Crete, where he met the beautiful Artemis, his feminine counterpart where hunting was concerned. Here the story varies considerably. One version goes that, noting how frequently the pair hunted together, and fearing that Artemis may become yet another conquest of Orion, her brother Apollo challenged her to hit a speck in the sea, a speck which in reality was Orion swimming. He was killed with a single arrow shot from her bow. Another variant of the story has Orion boasting of his ability to kill all animals, no matter how dangerous they were. The gods, rightly fearing for the world's ecology should he decide to put his boast to the test, produced a gigantic scorpion, whose body was so heavily encased that Orion was unable to pierce through the armour, and was himself stung to death. In both cases, so the story goes, Artemis was greatly saddened and arranged for Orion to be immortalized among the stars.

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|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|--|
| 1. Betelgeuze (alpha) | .7       | - orange -        | - means: The Armpit of the Central One |
| 2. Rigel (beta)       | .3 and 8 | - bluish white    | - means: The Left Leg                  |
| 3. Bellatrix (gamma)  | 2.0      | - pale yellow     | - means: The Female Warrior            |
| 4. Mintaka (delta)    | 2.4      | - brilliant white | - means: Belt                          |
| 5. Alnilam (epsilon)  | 1.8      | - bright white    | - means: String of Pearls              |
| 6. Alnitak (zeta)     | 2.5      | - topaz yellow    | - means: The Girdle                    |

#### Mythology of the constellation Canis Major

CANIS MAJOR, The Greater Dog, and in particular the bright star Sirius, was often featured in early Egyptian lore. At various times in Egyptian history it was identified with the goddess Isis, with the cow-goddess Hathor and with the jackal-headed god Anubis. Sirius was considered very highly by the Egyptians, since its re-appearance in mid-July, after several months' absence, coincided with the annual flooding of the Nile, an event so essential to the fertility of the land. Sirius also became known as the "Dog Star", representing the hottest days of summer referred to in bygone times as Dog Days. In Greek mythology, CANIS MAJOR, represented the larger of the two dogs belonging to the great hunter Orion. The dog seems to be in the act of leaping after the Lepus the Hare, and because of his incredible speed, he was honored by Zeus and placed in the heavens.

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| 1. Sirius (alpha) | (really negative) -1.43 | - brilliant white | - means: sparkling or scorching (Dog-Star) |
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#### Mythology of the constellation Canis Minor

CANIS MINOR, The Lesser Dog, was Orion's second hunting dog.

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| 1. Procyon (alpha) | 0.4 | - yellowish white | - means: before brightest (rose before Sirius) |
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#### Mythology of the constellation Gemini

This zodiacal constellation represents the twins Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux to the Romans). These were born from an egg after their mother, Leda, Queen of Sparta, had been seduced by Zeus, disguised as a swan. Although only half brothers, Castor, the mortal son of Leda's husband, King Tyndareus, and Polydeuces, immortal son of Zeus, were extremely close and together took part in many adventures. Sadly, on one of these Castor was killed. Polydeuces avenged Castor's murder, but was so overcome with grief that he begged to be allowed to be with his brother in the underworld. Zeus, knowing the strength of their feelings, and for once showing some compassion, granted this request. He placed the twins side by side in the heavens so that they could alternate their time together between Hades and the home of the gods.

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| 1. Castor (alpha) | 2.7 | - bright white    | - means: The Horseman                  |
| 2. Pollux (beta)  | 1.1 | - orange          | - means: the immortal, the son of Zeus |
| 3. Alhena (gamma) | 2.2 | - brilliant white | - means: the Proudly Marching One      |

#### Mythology of the constellation Taurus

To the Egyptians TAURUS, The Bull, symbolized both Osiris and his sister Isis who were represented as a bull-god and cow-goddess respectively. In Greek legend, Taurus is identified with the disguise adopted by Zeus in yet another of his amorous adventures. On this occasion, the god had fallen in love with the beautiful Europa, daughter of King Agenor, as she strolled with her companions on the seashore. He suddenly appeared amongst them as a magnificent white bull, but one which was so gentle that they felt no fear. Europa and her maidens gathered flowers and made garlands which they hung around the animal's neck and, such was their trust in his docility, that Europa climbed upon his back. However, at this moment, the bull plunged into the sea and swam away furiously with the terrified girl. When they reached Crete, Zeus revealed his true identity and ravished her. She was to bear him three sons, the first of which, Minos, introduced the bull cult to Crete.

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| 1. Aldebaran (alpha) | 1.2 | - pale rose  | - means: The Follower (of the Pleiades) |
| 2. Al Nath (beta)    | 2.1 | - pure white | - means: The Butting One                |







