Stories in the Stars

Sky Mythology from Around the World
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Time Stories:

How the Seasons Were Set  *Native American*  p. 2

How Night Was Let Loose and All the Animals Came to Be  *Brazil*  p. 4

Sun and Moon Stories:

Sun and Moon  *Africa*  p. 5

Why the Moon Has Scars on Her Face  *India*  p. 6

The Creation of the Moon  *Native American*  p. 7

The Milky Way:

Mud Turtle and Snapping Turtle  *Native American*  p. 8

The Stellar Dance  *Australia*  p. 9

The Magellanic Clouds  *Australia*  p. 12

Constellation Stories:

The Story of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor  *Greece*  p. 12

Thor’s Wagon (Big Dipper)  *Sweden*  p. 13

The Night Raven or Eternal Teamster (Big Dipper)  *Germany*  p. 13

Orvandel’s Toe (Big Dipper)  *Norse Legend*  p. 14

Cassiopeia  *Greece*  p. 14

Draco  *Greece*  p. 15

Auriga  *Greece*  p. 15

The Spartan Twins (Gemini)  *Greece*  p. 16

Canis Major and Canis Minor  *Greece*  p. 16

The Pleiades  *Polynesian*  p. 17

The Pleiades as Year Marker (Halloween)  *Celtic*  p. 18

Nu Kua and the Great Flood (The Hyades)  *China*  p. 18

Crux  *Argentina/Brazil*  p. 20

Lepus: The Egg-laying Rabbit  *Germanic*  p. 20

How Orion Lost His Sight  *Greece*  p. 20

The Lazy Sisters and the Hard Working Young Men (Orion’s Belt and Pleiades)  *Japan*  p. 22 & 23

Tanabata (Altair and Vega)  *Japan*  p. 22 & 23

Wiranú (Coal Sack and parts of Scorpius), Tapi’1 (bright and dark Milky Way areas near Pegasus), Mainâmy (Corvus), Yár Rapagáw (parts of Ursa Major and Leo Minor), and Zauxihu Rapagáw (Corona Borealis)  *Brazil*  p. 24
How the Seasons Were Set

From the book *Why the North Star Stands Still and Other Indian Legends*, published by Zion Natural History Association www.zionpark.org. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

When he made winter, Tobats, the elder god, was angry. He sent it down upon tu-weap, the earth, because the grumblings and complainings of the living things greatly annoyed him. He thought he would give them something to complain about.

Before that time there had been only summer. The living things knew nothing but summer and when Tobats poured snow down upon them, they set up a great cry of fear and distress.

Now they had both winter and summer, but no time limit had been set on either. Sometimes when winter came it remained with them for a long time. Then when summer's turn came, the weather was hot for a long time. When either of them came they never seemed to know when to go away. Sometimes it was hot for just a little while and then the cold would come for a long time. Sometimes the cold weather was short and then it was hot for a long time. Winter and summer seemed to be fighting each other all the time. It was not good that way.

The Indians and the animals talked about this condition in so-pa-ro-ie-van, the council meeting. They wondered what could be done about it. They wondered how it could be changed. They wondered why Weather Man acted that way.

Mo-se-va-cut, the owl, said, "I can see in the night and I can see in the daytime, too. My eyes are always open."

"What have you seen?" asked kumo, the jack rabbit. "I have seen many things," answered the owl. "I have seen that fellow that makes the weather goes backward and forward on a long straight trail. His home is at the middle of it."

"How can that make tu-weap go cold and hot?" asked cho-ink, the talkative blue jay.

"I don't believe it does," said quampie, the spider.

"Well," said mo-se-va-cut, "when Weather Man goes north it is always cold. Tom, the winter, travels with him. If Weather Man goes only a little way and then turns back, it is a short cold. When he goes to the end of the trail, that makes a full winter. But tom, the winter, stays with Weather Man until he gets back home. That makes the cold very long, like two winters coming together."

"That is too much winter," said skoots, the squirrel, "my nuts do not last that long."

"When Weather Man goes south," the owl explained, "it is the same way, only tats, the summer, travels with him instead of tom, the winter."

"What can we do about this? There is too much winter and there is too much summer," asked many of the living things in chorus. One said, "Let us go and shorten that trail. Send gopher and prairie dog to build piles of earth up on each end. That will make Weather Man stumble and turn back."

Medicine Man said, "We better talk with Shinob about this. Maybe he made it like it is."

Now pan-ah-wich, the night bird, sat on the ground and listened to all this talk. He thought much but said little. He had an idea. He wanted to be sure about Weather Man's going back and forth over that long straight trail. He, too, could see in the night, so he decided to sit in the same tree with mo-se-va-cut and see what he could see. He went home with the owl and there he sat and he saw that mo-se-va-cut was right. Together they watched Weather Man make his uncertain trips.
The living things called loudly for Shinob to come to so-pa-ro-ie-van, the council meeting. When he came they told him of the trouble Weather Man was making for them.

"What do you want?" asked Shinob. "You are never satisfied. You grumble about everything. First tats, the summer, had all the time and you cried it was too hot. Now you have half tats and half tom and it is too much of both. What do you want?"

Mo-se-va-cut said, "We wish you would cut a piece off each end of the weather trail."

"No," said Shinob, "that would never do. That would make the year too short. Tats has six moons for his time and tom has six moons for his time. That keeps time all straight on tu-weap."

The council still said it was not good, it was too much hot and it was too much cold. Shinob lost his patience and said, "Well, that is the way it is, and if anybody can think of a better way he can try it if all the living things are willing and will not trouble me any more."

Promptly pan-ah-wich, the night bird, hopped down from his perch in the tree and said, "I have a better way."

"What is your way?" asked Shinob.

"Make two more seasons, so there will be one for each corner of tu-weap," answered pan-ah-wich. "Then," he continued, "make the weather trail round instead of straight."

"What good will that do?" asked Shinob with some irritation for he thought it was impudence for the night bird to tell him how things should be.

"Let the weather trail go around by each corner of the earth," repeated pan-ah-wich. "Put one of the new seasons between winter and summer on one side, and put the other new season between winter and summer on the other side. Call the four seasons taman (spring), tats (summer), u-wan (fall) and tom (winter). Weather Man can go around that circle always in the same direction. He will not have to go back and forth as he does now. Always the seasons will be the same length and they will follow each other always in the same order."

Tobats, the elder god, laughed out loud and said, "Pan-ah-wich's plan is better than Shinob's." The living things agreed also. They said, "We like four seasons and a round trail best."

This concurring sentiment made Shinob a little jealous and he tried to think of some way to upset the plan. He said, "Yes, this is a good way. We will give each season twelve moons."

"Oh, no, not that much," cried all the living things. "That would be worse than the straight trail. That would spoil everything. We would die before Weather Man could get all the way around. We must have shorter seasons than that."

While Shinob insisted on twelve moons for each season and the council was pleading for less, old Tobats, who was enjoying Shinob's discomfort, spoke up. He said to Shinob, "You promised that anyone who had a better way could try it out if the living things were willing. This is pan-ah-wich's plan. Let him say how many moons for each season."

The night bird called out quickly, "Three moons for taman, three moons for tats, three moons for u-wan, three moons for tom." He flew hastily away for Shinob was hunting a rock to throw at him.

Old Tobats and the council accepted the night bird's plan. They broke up Weather Man's straight trail and made him a good smooth new one that went around by all the four corners of tu-weap. From that day to this he has traveled around and around that circle trail. He never turns back as he did on the straight path and each three moons brings him to another corner of tu-weap and
to the beginning of another season. The living things have never complained since about the weather, and the seasons follow each other in regular order: spring, summer, fall, winter.

The jealous younger god wanted to kill pan-ah-wich and followed him out of the council meeting for that purpose. The wise bird, knowing his intentions, led him off into bushes that were loaded with luscious ripe berries. Shinob tasted and, forgetting his anger, remained to eat. The night bird’s plan for the seasons has worked so well that no one wants to change it any more. Pan-ah-wich is honored and respected by all the living things on tu-weap, the earth, but he still is nervous and fearful and does most of his flying about at night. He is not sure that Shinob’s anger is entirely dead and he would not like to meet the god in the daylight when he could see to throw straight.

How Night Was Let Loose and All the Animals Came to Be

A tale told by the Mundurucu Indians of Brazil. From the book The Earth is on a Fish’s Back by Natalia Belting, Holt Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1965.

In the beginning there was no darkness anywhere save at the bottom of the seas.

The Great Serpent had a daughter and the daughter was wed to a youth.

“It is not good that there is light all the time,” the youth said to his wife. “We cannot lie in bed and take our ease, we cannot rest when there is no darkness.”

“My father guards the Night,” his wife said.

The husband summoned three servants. “Go at once to the house of the Great Serpent who is the father of your mistress. Say that his daughter desires the gift of Night from him.” The servants did as they were bid.

“Your daughter has sent us,” they said, when they had come to the dwelling of the Great Serpent. “She asks you for a gift of Night. Her husband also desires it.”

The Great Serpent gave them a nut of the orange-colored tucuma palm. “Night is shut up inside this nut,” he said to the servants. “Guard it carefully and carry it back to your mistress, my daughter. Do not open it, or you will be punished.”

The servants took the nut. They set their canoe the river and turned toward the place from which they had come. As they traveled they heard a sound coming from the nut. It was the sound of the insects of Night, scratching and calling, but the servants did not know it.

“I have never heard a palm nut with noise such as this,” one servant said.

“Such strange noises,” the second servant said.

“Perhaps we should open the nut and see what is wrong,” the third servant said.

“The Great Serpent forbade us to open it,” the second servant said.

“But if there is something wrong inside, we must find out,” the third servant said, and the other servants agreed with him.

They pulled the canoe close to shore and tied it up. They built a fire to heat the nut to open it.

They separated the halves of the nut.

Night flew out. Night flew over the servants and all the insects of the Night flew out. Day was hidden by Night.

“We have let loose darkness,” the first servant said.
The daughter of the Great Serpent said to her husband, “See, it is already hiding Day.”

The servants came hastily to their mistress and confessed what they had done. “We disobeyed the commands of your father, the Great Serpent,” the first servant said.

“We opened the nut he gave us to bring to you,” the second servant said.

“For that,” their mistress said, “you will be punished. You shall be monkeys and not men. You shall dwell in the forests and swing among the trees and chatter foolishly.”

The daughter of the Great Serpent made the cubuju, and put white on its head and red on its feathers and appointed it to sing in the morning to divide Night from Day. She made the inambu, and powdered it gray with ashes and appointed it to sing in the evening to divide Day from Night. And all the men who were in the forests at the moment the servants opened the nut became animals and birds. Whatever men were upon the water were changed into fishes and water birds. Even the fisherman in his canoe was changed. The canoe became a duck, and the fisherman’s head became the duck’s head, and his paddle became the duck’s webbed feet.

And from that time there has been both Night and Day.

Sun and Moon: An African Story

Once upon a time, the Sun and the Moon were happily married. All day long they would shine together on the Earth, and at night they would go to sleep at the same time. But all night long there was darkness, a deep and dreadful darkness on the Earth, and people were afraid to leave their houses, afraid they would get lost.

So the people appealed to the Sun and the Moon, crying out with a frail voice, “Oh please, Mr. Sun and Mrs. Moon! Give us some light at night so we don’t have to be afraid!”

The Sun and the Moon considered this problem, and they decided that HE would shine all day and SHE would shine all night. Then people would not have to be afraid of the dark.

Now at this time the Sun and Moon were both very bright, and they were both very hot. So with the Sun watching over people all day and the Moon all night, the night was just as bright and hot as the day! You couldn’t tell where the day left off and the night began.

People were not happy with this new arrangement. Not at all! They couldn’t sleep. Always either the Sun or the Moon was shining in their eyes. Not only that, but it was always hot. The Earth never had a chance to cool off. The ground became dry and the crops began to die.

“Oh, Mr. Sun and Mrs. Moon,” cried the people. “Please do something. We can’t sleep, and it is always hot, and our crops are drying up.”

“Yes,” said the Sun, “and I’m not happy either. I never see my wife anymore. When I am shining, she is sleeping; when she is shining, I am sleeping. Come, my dear,” he said to the Moon, “let’s go back to our old ways and shine together all day and sleep all night.”

“No,” said the Moon. “I like it this way. If I shine with you, no one ever notices me. But now that I shine all by myself, everyone sees me, and admires me.”

“You are a very vain Moon,” the Sun said angrily. “But have your own way. I can’t
force you. However, if you must shine all night, will you please shine less brightly so people can sleep? And will you please have less heat, so you don’t kill the crops?”

“What about you?” she answered. “Why can’t you dim your own light if you’re so concerned about people on Earth?”

“Me?” cried the Sun. “Not me!”

“Well then, not me either!” said the Moon.

“But one of us must dim or people cannot survive,” the Sun said. Then he went on slyly, “I’ll tell you what: we’ll have a race. A swimming race across the river. Whoever reaches the other side first gets to shine during the day.”

“Done!” cried the Moon, and she dashed for the river without waiting for a signal, cheating to get a head start. But the Sun was quick upon her heels and raced after her.

When they reached the river’s edge, Mr. Sun stopped suddenly and let Mrs. Moon dive into the water first. There was a long, loud HISSSS, and a cloud of steam rose up over the river. Above it all, you could hear Mrs. Moon crying, “Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Mrs. Moon had forgotten that she was made of fire, and fire and water do not mix. When she came out of the river, she had lost her heat. And she had hardly any light left. When she saw her husband, she was so angry that she picked up a stick and went after him.

Old Mr. Sun turned around and ran like he had hot pepper on his tail, with Mrs. Moon right behind him. And she’s still chasing him. That’s why now the sun and the moon can’t keep company together, why he races across the sky, and she chases after him, night after day after night after day after night.

Why the Moon Has Scars on Her Face

A tale told by the Baiga of India.

Once the Moon was fair-skinned, and she was ashamed of her fairness. Men looked at her and laughed. Women pointed to her and laughed. “Hide yourself, Moon,” they taunted her. “You are the color of a grub-worm. You were found under a stone.”

So Moon hid herself. There was no light in the night. Men lost themselves in the darkness and animals could not hunt. Sun said to his sister, “Moon, you cannot hide yourself. You must give light.”

“If men must have light,” Moon replied, “then you give it to them.”

“That I cannot do,” Sun answered. “My light is too bright. They must have your light so they can rest their eyes. My heat is too great. I will burn the earth if I shine all the time.”

“I am ugly,” Moon said. “I am ashamed of my ugliness. There is no color in my skin. Men laugh at me.”

The Sun thought awhile. “You must be tattooed,” he said finally. “Then men will call you beautiful.”

“But who will tattoo me?” Moon asked.

“There is a woman in the village beyond the great forest. I see her working. Men come from all the villages so that she may tattoo them. The women come with the men. The children come with the men and the women. Go to her, Moon. Have her tattoo you.”

The Moon went to the woman. “Woman,” Moon said, “I have come that you may tattoo my face. I have come that I may be
beautiful and men will not laugh at me because I am fair-skinned.”

“I must be paid for my work,” the woman answered.

“I will pay you,” Moon said.

“Four rupees,” the woman said.

“One rupee is enough,” Moon said.

“Four rupees, or I will not do it.”

“One rupee is all you charge a man when you tattoo him. One rupee is all you charge a woman when you tattoo her.”

“Four rupees,” the woman repeated. “Four rupees to tattoo you, Moon.”

“Four rupees,” Moon agreed. “I will pay four rupees.”

“And my food each day,” the woman added.

“I will pay four rupees,” Moon said. “I will not supply your food for you.”

“Four rupees and all that I can eat,” the woman said, “or I will not tattoo you.”

“I will not pay it,” Moon said.

“Go to another, then,” the woman answered. “Have another tattoo you, Moon.”

“Then you will pay my price. Four rupees and all the food I can eat each day.”

Moon agreed. “Four rupees and all the food you can eat each day,” she said.

“A bargain,” the woman said, and took out her needles. The woman worked through the day. She worked another day. Another. Another.

She tattooed a tortoise on Moon’s face. She tattooed a hare, leaping. She tattooed a scorpion. She tattooed two eggs. She was finished.

Moon looked at herself in a pool of water. Moon paid the woman four rupees and all the food she could eat.

Now Moon is beautiful. Men look at Moon. “She is beautiful,” they say.

Women look at Moon. “All Moon needs is a bangle to hang on her forehead,” they say. “Then she will be as beautiful as we are.”

Children look at the Moon. They see the tortoise and the hare, leaping, and the scorpion and the two eggs. They do not laugh at the Moon because she is fair-skinned.

The Creation of the Moon

Dine (Navajo) Story

After First Man and First Woman arrived in the Fifth World, they decided to make this world brighter than the lower worlds had been. They thought and talked for a long time. At last they decided. They would make a sun and a moon.

First they made the sun. They took a piece of rock crystal and made it round and flat. They fastened turquoise around it and around the turquoise they placed rays of red rain. They placed bars of lightning beyond the red rain. They fastened onto it feathers from the flicker, the lark, the cardinal, and the eagle.

Then they made the moon. They took mica and they made it round and flat, as they had made the sun, although they did not make it as large. Around it they placed white shells and then sheet lightning and then water from the four directions.
After they had done this, they began to talk again. “Where shall we have the sun and the moon rise and set?” First Man asked. Then East Wind spoke up, “Have sun brought to my direction,” East Wind said. “Let it begin its journey there each day.”

So it was decided.

Now they needed to give life to sun and moon. They needed someone to carry them across the sky. The young man who had planted the reed that carried the people up into the Fifth World was chosen to carry the sun. The old man who brought the earth in which the reed was planted was chosen to carry the moon. They were pleased.

First Man and First Woman gave them new names. “You who will carry the sun,” they said, “your name will now be Johanaa’ei, The One Who Governs the Day.”

Then they turned to the old gray-haired man. “You who carry the moon,” they said, “your name will now be Tle’ehoonaa’ei, The One Who Governs the Night.”

Now it was time to set the two of them on their paths. First Man decided how they would find their way. He gave them each a fan made of twelve feathers from the eagle’s tail, for those are the feathers the great bird used to guide itself across the sky.

Sun began his journey first. Johanaa’ei climbed up into the sky, guided by the eagle feathers, and passed safely across the heavens until he came at last to the west. Now it was the turn of the Moon. Tle’ehoonaa’ei, The One Who Governs the Night, began to climb up into the sky. But because he was an old man, it was harder for him to do this. East Wind saw how hard it was for Moon.

“I will help,” East Wind said.

East Wind blew as hard as he could to help lift Moon into the sky. But he blew so hard that the feathers of the fan blew into Moon’s face. He could not see where he was going. So it is that, to this day, although the Sun always follows the twelve paths across the sky, Moon takes a wandering way. Sometimes Moon even becomes lost, turning his face away from Earth as he tries to see his way. If you look carefully at Moon on the nights when his face is fully turned toward the Earth, you may see those feathers on his face.

Mud Turtle and Snapping Turtle: An Odawa Story

A good story will often make you think about things you almost never think about. This story is one of those.

Millions and millions of years ago, when earth was still a baby, Mud Turtle and Snapping Turtle were always arguing as to who could swim the fastest. When they weren’t arguing about who could swim the fastest, they were arguing about who could swim the deepest, or the farthest. Day after day they argued. Throughout the whole summer, not a day went by that they didn’t argue about whom was the best swimmer.

One day they decided they would settle the argument once and for all. They would have a race across Lake Michigan. They would start on the Michigan side and swim underwater all the way to the side that we now call Wisconsin. Both agreed and a day was set.

On the day of the race, Mud Turtle and Snapping Turtle met on the beach on the Michigan side. Both took deep breaths to fill their lungs with air, and the race was on. Both turtles swam off at great speed. Faster and faster they swam, but neither could swim faster than the other. Shoulder to shoulder they swam. Faster and faster.
Now you must understand that the bottom of Lake Michigan, the land under the lake, is very much like the lay of land above the lake, like dry land. The bottom of Lake Michigan has hills and valleys and trenches and bumps and even cliffs and ridges.

Faster they swam, and then even faster. Neither could pass the other. But then Mud Turtle had an idea. “I can do something Snapper can’t,” thought Mud Turtle as he shot through the water with Snapper right beside him. “I can swim in the mud,” he thought. So Mud Turtle dove down to the very bottom of Lake Michigan. Snapper stayed right beside him.

As the two turtles swam along the bottom of Lake Michigan their great speed and the power of their swimming kicked up a great mud trail behind them. The faster they swam the more mud and debris they kicked up. Sand, gravel, rocks and even old dead trees.

Suddenly, Mud Turtle dove down even farther, right into the mud. He was completely covered by mud. He was swimming now like some supernatural mud turtle. Snapper couldn’t keep up. The mud and sticks and rocks and boulders and tree stumps made it so Snapper couldn’t see a thing. After a short distance he had to give up. But still Mud Turtle swam on at lightning speed and the mud trail billowed behind him.

Then, all at once, Mud Turtle came to an underwater cliff wall. Up and up he swam, up the face of the cliff, his mud trail following behind. By now Mud Turtle was swimming faster than any human can describe.

With a great splash Mud Turtle broke through the surface of Lake Michigan. He was swimming at such tremendous speed that he swam right up into the sky. The mud trail followed him, boulders, mud, kneecaps of mastodons, teeth and bones of wooly mammoths and dinosaurs, tree stumps, seaweed, all went up into the sky following Mud Turtle. Mud Turtle continued to swim across the sky and the mud trail followed. And that mud trail became what we call today the Milky Way Galaxy.

So that’s the story of how the Milky Way got into the sky. I bet we don’t think of the Milky Way very often, and we almost never think of the bottom of Lake Michigan. Some say that when all the animals get together for a big meeting, that it is the turtle who represents all of the water beings. The turtle carries messages from the land animals to the water beings.

The Stellar Dance

The Aboriginal peoples of Australia, like all hunters and gatherers, lived in small groups, altogether making up some seven hundred tribes. Each tribe traveled within an area of several hundred square miles, following the trails laid down by their mythic ancestor who left words and musical notes along with footprints. These song lines took them on well-worn paths to places where animals and plants were more plentiful.

Being on the move so often, the tribe had to travel light, carrying just the tools necessary to get food. The women needed sticks to gather seeds, roots, and fruits to fill their coolamons, wooden dishes. The men carried hunting weapons that included boomerang, spear and woomera, a wooden spear thrower. They would hunt animals, such as kangaroo, emu and flying fox, a large fruit-eating bat.

The Aboriginal peoples call the time of the world’s creation the Dreamtime. This was when the spirit ancestors arose from the earth and took journeys through the empty countryside. They formed waterholes and rivers to sustain life. They populated the land with animals and plants. It was during the Dreamtime that the Great Spirit made humans.
Back in the Dreamtime, when the earth was young, the Great Spirit, Baiame, made his home in a mountain. Baiame looked out at what he had created. “The world is full of beauty,” he said, “but it needs dancing life to fulfill its destiny.”

With that, the Great Spirit created man. It was one of these creations, a man named Priepriggie, who brought the Milky Way into being. This is how it happened.

In northeast Australia, in a narrow glen, lived a small tribe of valley people. Unlike other tribes in that area, they danced every night, not just on special occasions.

In the dark above, the stars were in chaos. They wheeled this way and that way, a turmoil of lights across the sky. Like a crackling fire shooting sparks in all directions, the stars glinted first here, then there. From one blink of an eye to the next, the night looked vastly different. No one could tell one part of the sky from another, for it was always changing. It seemed that the stars were tousled by fierce heavenly winds.

Unlike the chaos of the stars in the sky above, there was order in that dip of earth far below. Priepriggie brought harmony to his people with songs and chants and dances that flowed and pulsed in the night.

“Ah! Priepriggie,” the people said. “Such a singer, such a hunter, such a medicine man. He is so gifted, so skilled, and so powerful, surely he can get the stars to move together and dance to his songs.”

In order to have the strength to dance hour after hour, these men and women needed to find food enough for their one big meal. During the day, the women gathered plants and dug roots while the men hunted. And the one who always brought back the most food was Priepriggie.

One morning just at daybreak, Priepriggie began his hunting expedition in a different direction. This time he walked along the river bank, stepping softly through the low mist.

Coming to an enormous tree, he saw a multitude of flying fox hanging from the branches like bunches of berries. These flying fox were sleeping after their own nightly foray for food. These bats made delicious morsels, but Priepriggie needed more than that to feed his hungry tribe. He then spotted their leader, who was so gigantic that he alone would make a fitting meal for all the people.

The enormous bat was asleep in the very center of the huddled multitude. With steps lighter than a spider’s, Priepriggie circled the tree to close in on his target. He carefully placed his spear into his woomera. Bit by bit, he drew the woomera back to launch it. Priepriggie drove the woomera forward, sending the spear humming toward his target. The spear lanced the bat and transfixed him to the tree.

The thunderous blow awoke the throng of flying fox. They rushed up with the clicking of angry wings. Like a whirling dust devil, they flew round and round the tree, awaiting the flight of their leader.

But he did not join them. Only after going around and around did the circling band see that their leader would never come again; the spear which killed him was still quivering.

Then they spied the woomera on the ground. Squatting behind was Priepriggie awaiting the moment when he could carry off his gigantic bounty. Down plunged the flying fox. They hoveerd around the hunter only for an instant. They swooped down on him so quickly, he could not escape.

Four flying fox grasped his hair in their claws. Two drew up to his chin, each placing one wing underneath his jaw and extending the other. The others ringed themselves around Priepriggie. So equally
spaced were they that one side of the hunter’s body could have been a clear pool’s reflection of the other. One bat was under his right jaw, one under his left. Each elbow was upheld by seven, his thigh had nine, his knee two. Several small bats were under his feet. Priepriggie was now cloaked in flying fox.

As if on signal, each bat began to beat its one free wing. They moved in concert, like one body, ascending higher and higher, lifting the hunter high above the clouds. Priepriggie vanished into the heavens beyond, far from sight.

As the sun went down that evening, his tribe gathered to eat and to dance, as they had done each night. They built a fire in the stone fire pit. But they had little to cook, for neither game nor roots filled their coolamons. They were hoping that Priepriggie had a successful hunt, enough to feed them all, but he was nowhere to be seen.

“Where is he?” asked Loolo, a very fearful man. “This is not like Priepriggie. Something awful must have happened.”

“Any one of us can have a little difficulty that slows us down, even Priepriggie,” said Wahn, the oldest man of the tribe. “While we are waiting for him to return, let us dance and sing. It will help us forget our hunger. And maybe our songs will bring Priepriggie back that much sooner.”

The men and women tried to dance, but their legs were like fallen logs, as heavy as their hearts. They needed someone to set the rhythm, to lead them in their dance.

Suddenly, a singer’s voice came from afar. They stopped and strained their ears.

“Do you hear that?” said Nungeena, a young woman with ears sharp as a spear. “That is Priepriggie’s voice.”

Louder and louder came the song, clearer and clearer was the rhythm. It came from high above them. They lifted their heads up, toward the source of the welcome sounds. They scanned the sky, looking for Priepriggie. But they did not see him.

Instead the beheld the stars. The stars! No longer were they a turmoil of lights, scattered this way and that way. No longer were they like the sparks from their fire pit, glinting here and there. The stars were moving together, dancing to the rhythms of Priepriggie’s music!

“We, too, will dance like the stars,” said Wahn, starting to nod in time to the beat.

As if weights had been lifted from their hearts, they began to step lightly, sometimes in a line, sometimes in a circle. And with the dance steps, they sang to the music coming from above.

It was astonishing. Priepriggie was leading both the people and the stars in a new dance, one never done before. On and on they danced, far into the night.

The song ended, and with it, the dance. Exhausted, all the dancers dropped to the earth.

Wahn, Loolo, Nungeena, and, in fact, all the tribe collapsed to the ground. When they blinked open their eyes, their mouths dropped in awe.

The stars, too, had dropped, and were lying exactly where they had fallen after the festive dance. No longer were they scattered this way and that. No longer were they glinting here and there. Now the stars were arrayed across the sky, forming a band of light.

Priepriggie’s stellar dance had taken the chaos of the starry heavens and made the Milky Way, the soft light that traverses the sky from one end to the other.
The people grieved for Priepriggie. They missed him, for it was he who had found the most nourishing food for their bodies. It was he who had offered the most refreshing food for the spirit. But they knew, as if Baiame, the Great Spirit himself, had told them, that only his song could have enchanted the stars into harmony. Only Priepriggie could have led the stellar dance, the dance that gave all below the joy of the milky light that now stretches across the heavens.

The Magellanic Clouds

For the most part, the Magellanic Clouds are insignificant to Aborigine legends. When mentioned they are usually seen only as camps for the star people. In one story, however, there is more. As usual, the Clouds were thought to be camps; the large cloud was for an elderly man and the small cloud for his old, feeble wife. The couple had grown too old to catch their own food, and the other star people caught fish and lily bulbs for them in the sky river (the Milky Way). The space between them is their cooking fire, while the bright star Achernar represents their meal.

The Story of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor or The Tale of the Bears’ Long Tails

A Greek Lesson

Think about what life was like two thousand years ago. It was a time when people did not understand all things of nature, like the changing of the seasons, or why we have day and night. At the time when Greek and Roman legends were being told, people made up stories to explain all these mysterious occurrences. Forces of nature like the sun, the moon, and the earth were all ruled by Gods. The gods in the Greek and Roman stories were immortal or could live forever, and always had special powers.

One day Hera came down from Mount Olympus and in the distance, saw a beautiful young mortal woman named Callisto, carrying a baby named Arcas. Hera was a vain woman and was totally obsessed with her own beauty. The closer she got to Callisto, the angrier she became.

Callisto had not even seen Hera until Hera started screaming and shrieking. Of course Callisto became petrified. All of the mortals knew Hera, Queen of the Skies, had a nasty temper.

Callisto begged, "What have I done? Why are you so angry with me?" She apologized, but Hera would not listen. Callisto could feel her clear skin being covered with thick fur. Claws replaced her fingernails. Her own beautiful teeth were replaced by fangs. When she tried to sooth her crying baby, her voice had turned into a deep growl. Callisto had been turned into a ferocious bear! The fairies had been looking on and realized they would have to find new parents for the child.

Callisto not only lost her child, but she could not fit in her small home, she had to go to live in the forest. Even though Callisto was a bear, she still had all of her human feelings. She was in constant fear of hunters with bows and arrows, and of other animals that might hurt her. She had no desire to learn to fight.

Callisto stayed close to the hut where Arcas lived with his new parents. When he went for walks alone, she followed him, just out of sight. During the night, she would peek into his window to watch him sleeping. He often told his new parents that he had a giant bear as an angel, but no one told him about his mother.

As time went on, hunters and dogs pursued this great bear, causing Callisto to flee into the depth of the woods, for her own safety. One winter day when Callisto was sleeping, she dreamed about her son. She missed him so much, she couldn't stand it. When she
awoke in the springtime, she had to go to see her son once again.

In the meantime, Arcas had grown up and was out hunting. The arrow was aimed at a bird, and Callisto was happy when he missed because she felt compassion for all animals. When Arcas turned, only to see this huge bear watching him, he was afraid. He drew another arrow from his quiver, slipped it into his bow and pulled it back, ready to release.

Luckily, Zeus happened to be watching from his place in the heavens. As he reached down to rescue Callisto, he thought about where he should grab a bear.

If he grabbed her by her head, she would bite him. If he grabbed her by the legs, she would scratch him. The safest thing to do would be to grab her by her tail and fling her up among the stars. Then quickly, he turned Arcas into a bear as well, and threw him into the sky beside his mother. Since the bears were so heavy, Zeus stretched the bears' tails, which explains why these celestial bears have long tails. In time, the tail of Arcas became even longer, since he was continuously swung around the sky by the end-star in his tail, Polaris.

The Queen of the Heavens, Hera, was furious that her husband had rescued Callisto and Arcas, putting them in honored places in the sky! She went down to Earth to consult with her friends Oceanus, and his wife Tethys. "How dare Zeus give these two mortals an honored place in the sky?" Hera fumed. "They have displaced me, Queen of Heaven, from my place in the sky. I ask that you keep these two in a cage forever."

Oceanus and Tethys agreed to Hera's request and promised to see to it that the pair would be penned up and never allowed to wonder below the horizon of the sea as other constellations do. To this day, the Little Bear and the Big Bear are held high in the sky near the Pole Star, and you can see them in the night sky during all of the seasons.

**Thor's Wagon**

The Vikings believed that the Big Dipper was the wagon of Thor, the god of thunder. (Thursday is named for Thor: Thor’s Day). When Thor rode his wagon across the sky, lightning flashed from the rims and thunder rumbled from the wheels. That was their way of explaining thunder and lightning.

**The Night Raven or Eternal Teamster**


According to Jacob Grimm (*Deutsche Mythologie*), Ursa Major was also called "Odin's Wagon" in ancient northern Europe. The legend reinforces this view, for Odin was associated with ravens.

During the night the night raven can be heard calling out with its "caw, caw." This bird is much larger than an ordinary raven, even as large as an old hen.

It is also called the eternal teamster. They say that for his portion of the Kingdom of Heaven he desired to be underway forever and ever. Thus he will be driving for all eternity, seated on the middle horse of Heaven's Wagon. The four large stars to the rear are the great wheels. The three stars in front, standing in a crooked line, are three horses. The small star above the middle one of these is the eternal teamster. He steers the horses, and because the wagon always goes in a circle, they are not in a straight line, but in a crooked one, for they are always making a turn.
Before midnight, it is said, he drives outward, and the wagon-tongue bends upward; after midnight he drives homeward, and it bends downward.

**Orvandel’s Toe : A Norse Legend**

Once, long ago, the giant sea warrior Orvandel had been waging a fight from dawn to dusk with the evil gods of ice, snow and frost. All day long the battle raged, and when night came, Orvandel fell to the ground, all but vanquished.

But when the great god Thor, who had been watching the contest, observed Orvandel losing his footing and dropping to his knees, he sped swiftly from his mountain castle to the aid of the giant. Above all things, he did not want Orvandel to be captured by the evil gods.

Arriving on the scene of the battle, Thor bent down, picked up Orvandel and carried him off. But the hero was by now so weak and faint, that he lay across the god’s outstretched arms, held high in order to cross several rivers on the road to safety.

Orvandel, however, was so spent that his head hung down on one side of the cradling arms and his feet dragged low on the other side. At the last river Orvandel’s foot touched the icy waters which froze one toe so quickly and so hard that it broke off.

The evil gods, still on the lookout, rushed eagerly to pick up any part of Orvandel they could lay their hands on. But before they were able to grab the toe, Thor reached down, seized it and threw it mightily into the heavens, where it remains to this day, to remind everyone of Orvandel’s bravery. Orvandel is the star pattern some call Orion, and his toe is Alcor, the faint little star just above the bend in the Great Bear’s tail.

Orion was also seen as Frey by the Vikings. Frey was the god of fertility and like Orion, Frey also carried a sword. But the sword was very special; it was shining and could fight on its own, because Frey really was more interested in love than in war.

**Cassiopeia**

This is a tale about a group of constellations we see in the winter sky if we look to the northwest. Each Greek or Roman tale is filled with special powers of immortal gods, magic, and made-up reasons why natural events happen. If a girl was born too beautiful, she would have to pay a price for her beauty whether she was vain and boastful or not.

This story takes place in eastern Africa in the country of Ethiopia. King Cepheus was married to a beautiful woman named Cassiopeia. They had a daughter named Andromeda. As parents tend to think their own children are more beautiful than any other child in the whole world, Cassiopeia was no exception. She boasted that her child’s beauty rivaled that of the sea nymphs.

When the sea nymphs heard of Cassiopeia’s boasting, they couldn’t stand the bragging. The complained to the god of the sea, Poseidon, who agreed that Cassiopeia should be punished for her boastfulness.

A long story involving other constellations better seen in the autumn sky could be told. In short, the king and queen’s daughter Andromeda was to be chained to a rock on the seashore, and sacrificed to Cetus, the sea monster. You can imagine how distraught her parents were! Just in the nick of time, Perseus flew in on winged feet and slew Cetus. Of course Perseus married Andromeda and they lived happily ever after.

In the skies, you will see Cetus forever chasing Andromeda, but he never gets any
closer to her. The winged Perseus continues to guard her in the sky. Andromeda’s parents, King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia were put in to sky by the god of the sea, Poseidon. However, when the sea nymphs saw Casseopeia’s place of glory, they complained noisily. To quiet them, Poseidon placed her upside down in her chair for half of the year. She must always be tied to her chair so she doesn’t fall out. The stars of Casseopeia are much brighter than those of Cepheus, just because her beauty was so noticeable.

Draco

The story of Draco is an early story in connection with all of the other Greek Myths. Evil gods ruled the earth and the heavens in the beginning. These evil gods enjoyed erupting volcanoes to scare the poor earthlings. They sent hydoras, which are many-headed monsters. Huge monsters were known as Giants or Titans who loved to carry out evil tricks.

War broke out when a new generation of gods wanted to stop the evil ways, and to fill the world with good. The new group included some of the mythological characters you may have already heard about, Zeus with his brothers Hades and Poseidon. The females were Demeter, Hera and Athena who was the goddess of Arts, Crafts, and War. (You might think this was an odd combination.) The war went on for ten years, as long as many of you have been alive.

During the battle, a Giant hurled a fiery dragon at Athena. Her mighty shield and magnificent strength allowed her to catch the dragon. Unafraid, she hurled the dragon into the heavens. The dragon twisted and coiled as he was swung so mightily, that he was actually tied into knots by the time he reached the heavens. Draco landed near the North Star and is circumpolar, or around the North Star. It neither rises nor sets, but sleeps forever as the battered dragon.

Auriga

Hephaestus was the child born to Hera, the goddess of the heavens. Hephaestus was born lame, so he walked with a limp and could not run. Hera was so upset that her child was handicapped that she threw him out of her home on Mount Olympus, down to earth.

Hephaestus was adopted by Vulcan, the god of fire, and Athene, the goddess of wisdom. Vulcan himself was lame, so he didn’t think Hephaestus’ life should be wasted just because he couldn’t walk easily. Vulcan taught Hephaestus the art of blacksmithing, using fire to make beautiful ornaments and armor of metal for the gods.

Hephaestus made himself a horse-drawn chariot, so he could move about more easily. It was sort of an early day powered wheelchair. The chariot allowed Hephaestus to work as a shepherd. He had a warm spot in his heart for animals, especially the young and the weak.

During the early battles Zeus fought against the Titans or Giants, Hephaestus told Zeus to go into battle holding the impenetrable skin of a goat as a shield. The head of the goat was still in the goatskin. In the battle, Zeus looked as though he was twice his normal size, and to be a ferocious animal, not a man. The Titans were afraid of this unrecognizable creature and ran away.

As payment for Hephaestus’ generosity, Zeus gave Hephaestus a place in the sky. When you look in the sky at the charioteer’s right shoulder, that brightest star is Capella. Capella is a female goat and there are three kids in Hephaestus’ arms. Mysteriously, the four horses that drew the chariot have all
disappeared. Hephaestus, the goats and his horseless chariot are known as Auriga.

The Spartan Twins

A Greek Legend

The two bright stars of Gemini have often been thought of as twins. The ancient Egyptians saw them as a pair of lotus blossoms. To the Arabs, they were two peacocks, and the Inuit imagined them as two door blocks at the entrance of an igloo. In Greek classical legend, they were Castor and Pollux, twin sons of the Spartan king Tyndareus and his queen Leda.

Long ago, in the Greek city of Sparta, lived the twin brothers Castor and Pollux. Spartan youths were well known for their strength and bravery, and these twins were no exception. Pollux was a champion boxer and runner, and his brother Castor was an excellent horseman, able to ride the wildest mounts. Both enjoyed games and tests of strength. But most of all, the brothers loved each other, even though the mighty god Zeus had given Pollux the gift of immortality while allowing Castor to remain mortal.

One day, seeking adventure, Castor and Pollux decided to join the crew of the vessel Argo, which was about to set sail in search of the Golden Fleece. Jason, the Argo’s captain, was delighted to have the brothers aboard, as were his crew of Argonauts.

Setting sail, they encountered rough weather, which turned into a roaring gale. As they wallowed in the heavy seas, the crew cried out to Orpheus the musician to touch his lyre and calm the terrible waves.

Suddenly, out of the wind-torn sky, twin lights appeared over the heads of Castor and Pollux. Some of the men thought they were stars; others saw them as twin fires. At the same moment, as suddenly as it had come, the storm ceased. Ever since that time, these twin fires, called St. Elmo’s fire, have meant fair weather for seafarers.

After returning safely with the Golden Fleece, Castor and Pollux set out on another mission, this time to find and drive out the pirates lurking in the Hellespont, the straits that separate Europe from Asia Minor. The brothers were again successful, and when they returned at last, the seas were safe for travelers once more.

By now, seamen throughout Greece and the ancient world were saying that the twins were special friends of the god Poseidon, and shipbuilders began placing the sign of the twins on the prows of their vessels.

Then, as young men will, the brothers fell in love. Unfortunately, the girls of their choice, nieces of Tyndareus, were already betrothed, and the men to whom they were engaged became angry and challenged the brothers to combat.

A great battle took place. At its end, the rivals of Castor and Pollux were dead, but Castor, too, had fallen, mortally wounded.

Pollux, knowing himself to be immortal, was torn with grief, and prayed to Zeus that he and his brother not be separated. Either he, Pollux, must share death with his brother, or Castor must be brought back to life. Touched by the request, Zeus willed that the brothers should share both death and immortality. So both of them lived for a time after that, and then they died and dwelt in the infernal regions. Later they were taken by the father of the gods and placed in the heavens for all to see, an example of love and devotion.

Canis Major and Canis Minor

During Greek and Roman times, there was a Great Dog. He served his masters as a watchdog and hunting dog and could outrun any wild beast. The dog lived a very long
time, and was given as a gift from one god to another.

As life is never perfect now, it was not then either. A fox lived in the forest near the Great Dog’s last owner. The fox could outrun and kill any dog! When the Great Dog met the fox, a great fight was sure to happen.

As usual, Zeus was looking down from his home on Mount Olympus. Just in the nick of time, he had to do something to stop the animals from killing each other. He was fond of both of them. With not a second to spare, he turned both the dog and the fox into stone.

Unsure of what to do with the stone animals, Zeus threw them into the sky. In Zeus’ wisdom and to prevent fighting, he placed each animal on a different bank of the Big Sky River, or the Milky Way. Orion and the Great Dog, or Canis Major, landed on the east bank of the river. The stone fox is called the Little Dog or Canis Minor. He landed on the west bank and could not swim across because as everyone knows, animals made of stone cannot swim. At least they landed next to Orion, so they could forever be part of a hunt.

The brightest star in the constellation Canis Major is called Sirius. It looks as if it could be a jewel the Big Dog’s collar. Procyon is also a bright star in Canis Minor, located on the rump of the Little Dog. These stars are two of the brightest stars in the sky. Even before the creation of these constellation stories, the stars were called “dog stars.”

Late in July, the sun appears close to Sirius. Sirius rises and sets with the sun. The Egyptians thought Sirius added heat to the sky because it was so close to the sun, that it scorched the earth. This hottest time of the year is often called “dog days”.

### The Pleiades

**A Polynesian Story**

The Pleiades, that tiny cluster of stars forming Taurus’ left shoulder, is one of the most striking sky objects we can see. It is not surprising that so small, so bright and so delicately woven a net of stars has always attracted people’s attention. There is nothing else like them in the whole world of stars. Birds, fireflies, maidens, or a single star slivered into fragments – we can imagine them all when we see the little pinpricks of light huddled close together in our cold, wintry skies.

The Polynesians call the Pleiades star cluster “Mata-riki,” or “Little Eyes.” They believe that long, long ago, before people inhabited the earth, these stars formed a single star. This was the most brilliant star in the sky. Its light rivaled that of the quarter moon, and when it rose, its reflection sparkled and danced along the sea and the whole world was white from its shining.

But unfortunately, the star was not only beautiful, it was also extremely proud and was always boasting of its splendor among the other stars, saying, “I am more beautiful than any of you — yes, more beautiful than even the gods or the jeweled heavens themselves.”

Now the god Tane, guardian of the four pillars of heaven, heard this and was angry. He determined to drive this ill-mannered and objectionable star out of the sky, away into the dark regions. To do so, he sought the help of two other stars, Sirius and Aldebaran. Sirius was the second brightest star in the sky and naturally had no great sympathy with a rival who was brighter than he. And Aldebaran was located so close to the brilliant star that his own light was perpetually dimmed by that of his neighbor. Both therefore agreed readily to Tane’s plan.
One dark night, the three allies crept up behind their quarry and made ready to chase it from the skies. The star was badly frightened when it saw them coming, and at first it ran and took refuge under the waters of a stream, the Milky Way. But Sirius climbed to the source of the Milky Way and diverted the course of the water. As it drained away, the poor fugitive was left unprotected and again it fled from them, under the arches of heaven and far beyond the silver palaces of the gods. It was swift of foot, and before long it had completely outdistanced them.

It looked as though the star might escape altogether, but Tane was a god, and not one to be outwitted. Suddenly he picked up Aldebaran and hurled him with such rage and vigor that the star was struck unaware as it ran, and smashed into six little pieces. Then the god and his star companions were satisfied and went away.

The six little fragments limped back to their place in the sky. Since that time Sirius shines as the brightest star in the sky, and Aldebaran is undimmed by any near rival. Yet the “Little Eyes,” small as they are, remain exceedingly brilliant and sometimes whisper proudly to each other that they are more lovely as six than as one. They no longer dare boast aloud how beautiful they are, but when nights are dark and quiet they still lean down close to see themselves in the mirror of the oceans, and then they know that they have no equal.

The Pleiades as year marker

Thousands of years ago, the Pleiades would reach their highest point in the sky at midnight on October 31st. (If you’re using this story in a planetarium program, and there is time, you can discuss diurnal, annual, and precessional motions.) Many cultures around the world based their calendars upon this event, including an ancient culture in Great Britain. For them October 31st was New Year Eve, and the Night of the Dead.

They believed that when a person died, their soul was trapped with their body until the last night of the year, October 31st. (Obviously, it was best to plan your death for the end of the year, not the beginning.) On that night, all of the fires throughout the land were put out so that the souls of the dead could travel peaceably into the west where they would pass into the afterlife.

If someone had a family member die during the year, they would put packets of food outside their doorsteps to fortify the soul on their journey. In order to prevent the souls from stopping to tarry with the living (if you had given Uncle Harry a hard time during the year before, you probably didn’t want him coming in to address the issue), people would also carve turnips to make lanterns to scare the souls away from their doors. Then at midnight, when all of the souls who had died during the year had passed on into the afterlife, a new sacred fire would be lit in the holiest site in the land to begin the new year. Runners would carry torches from this fire to all of the villages in the land so that everyone could start the new year with the sacred flame.

This tradition became of course, Halloween. The souls leaving their bodies became the tradition of having graves, skeletons, and ghosts at Halloween, the carved gourds became connected with the flame to produce Jack O’ Lanterns, and the packets of food for the souls of the dead became the custom of “Trick or Treat.”

Nu Kua and the Great Flood
A Chinese Legend

The five stars of the Hyades, the wedge-shaped face of Taurus the Bull, are well known in their own right. They have often been associated in mythology with rain and
dull weather, but unlike the wet, dreary constellations of the midwinter months, their rainy character was not considered destructive. In China the Hyades were also closely identified with rain, at least as early as 1100 BC and probably earlier, for there were already records of sacrifices and burnt offerings being made to them then. They were worshipped as the god Yu Shih, the master of rain and ruler of the waters of the Earth. The almost universal association of the Hyades and rainy weather has a basis in fact, for it was widely known that a dulling of the appearance of these stars was an indicator that rain was on the way. Today we know that this indicates that a warm front is approaching and that rain, or some form of precipitation, will follow within 24 to 48 hours. There is even an old proverb which reminds us of this ancient bit of weather wisdom:

"When the stars begin to huddle, The Earth will soon become a puddle."

Long ago the Chinese believed that nothing existed except the basic elements that were to shape the universe. There was water and earth, fire, wood and metal, but these five were without body and form. Then the universe and the Earth were created out of chaos by the goddess Nu Kua. The Earth she created was flat, and the great arch of the firmament above it was held in place by four pillars. These four pillars stood at the four cardinal points of the compass, and were guarded by the same four creatures that we find in the four quarters of the sky: the dragon, the bird, the tiger and the tortoise. Nu Kua fastened the pillars firmly to the mountains that lie on the Earth's horizon, spread out the fertile land between them, and allotted a certain space to each of the elements: earth and water, fire, wood and metal. Wood was the special element of the goddess herself.

No sooner was the creation complete, however, than evil forces rose against it out of the primeval abyss, the dark waters that still existed and from which Earth had been formed. The revolt was that of one element against another. Water fought against wood; the unstable seas fought against the newly established order. A primeval giant named Kung Kung defied the gods and turned against them all the strength of the impenetrable ocean. He raised up torrents of the sea, and the whirlpool, he brought the deluge and power of the dragon kings.

Nu Kua alone would have been defeated, for wood cannot stand alone against the flood, but the element of fire came to her rescue. The lord of fire dried up the waste of waters with his burning heat, and thus tamed the seas. Kung Kung himself was completely overthrown and exiled once more to the regions of outer darkness. But as he fell, he struck his head against the "imperfect mountain" and brought it crashing down. The pillars of heaven gave way, the four corners of the Earth crumbled, and it seemed that the newly-made universe was doomed.

Nu Kua, divine creator, molder of men from the yellow earth, was not dismayed. Taking up stones of the five precious colors, she melted these and used them to repair the shattered heavens. Cutting the feet away from the giant tortoise that stood in the north, she carved them into supports for the four pillars that upheld the sky. That explains why tortoises now have no legs to speak of. Pulling up reeds, she charred them and used them to halt the flood of waters that swirled over the Earth, thus saving the land for the people of China.

Upon leaving for the regions of outer darkness, the evil giant passed on his powers over the oceans and all watery things to his son, Yu Shih who made his home in the Hyades. Unlike his evil father, Yu Shih became the people's friend and brought them water when they needed it most.
Crux

A South American Story

According to the Guarani Indians (Paraguay, Southern Brazil, Northern Argentina), the constellation Crux is the footprint of the ~Nandu (a South American Ostrich). For the Guarani, the ~Nandu was one the creators and traveled along the road of creation (The Milky Way). According to this culture, the Milky Way is the road of creation and to their ancestors.

Another little bit that I learned was how the Guarani taught each other the stars (perhaps other cultures too). This is a technique that works really well (it was tried on me). The "student" looks at the sky. The "teacher" stands behind the student and "draws" the stars on the student's back. As the teacher "points" to the stars on the student's back, the student can make the connection between the patterns that he/she feels on his/her back and the real patterns in the sky.

Lepus: An Egg-Laying Rabbit

Have you ever wondered where the tradition of the egg-laying Easter Bunny comes from? After all, you won't find rabbits laying eggs in nature. Well, this tradition comes to us from an old Germanic myth about Spring.

It seems that once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a young bird who was very smart as birds go. But she still wasn't all that smart. After all, all she had was a bird brain to think with!

Well, she so much wanted a bigger brain to think with that she finally got up the courage to approach Easter, the spirit of spring. Easter was so intrigued by this brave little bird that she agreed to listen to the bird's plea. "Dear Easter, I so want to be able to think great thoughts, but this bird brain of mine won't let me. Won't you please, please change me into an bunny so that I might have a proper sized brain to think with?"

Easter was so overcome by the sincerity of the little bird that she granted her wish. The next thing the little bird knew, she was a rabbit. Ecstatic, the little bird-turned-bunny hopped off thinking her grand thoughts.

But now that she no longer had her wings to fly away from predators, the new bunny found herself constantly hopping for her life, as dogs and wolves and foxes all hunted her. The poor little bunny had a bigger brain to think with, but no time to think! In between hopping for her life, the little bunny realized that she had made a mistake asking to be turned into a bunny. She decided that she would have to return to Easter and ask for another favor, even if it was rather ungrateful.

Easter heard the bunny's plea for a safe place to stay, where she wouldn't be hunted all of the time and could relax and think her great thoughts. Easter agreed to place the little bunny up in the sky, below Orion, where, if she stayed very still, she could go unnoticed and think all the great thoughts she wanted to. We know the bunny today as the constellation of "Lepus, the Hare."

But Easter did require a service in return from Lepus, since this was, after all, the second favor Easter had granted the little bunny. Every spring, the bunny would have to lay eggs, just as she did back when she was still a bird, decorate them, and deliver them to children all over the world for Easter's birthday. And that is why the Easter Bunny lays eggs!

How Orion Lost His Sight

A Greek Myth

The constellation known as Orion, the hunter, has three stars which form a belt. The stars of the belt make it the most easily recognizable constellation in the southern part of the winter sky.

In Greek and Roman stories, Orion was the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea, so he had the power to walk unharmed over the
waters of the Earth. Orion was a giant, both in stature and courage, and a mighty hunter whose adventures were rivaled only by those of Hercules. For all his strength and fearlessness, like each of us, Orion had his own battles to fight.

One day when Orion was a young man, he fell in love with Merope, the daughter of Oenopion, an island king. Merope was so beautiful, Orion immediately asked her to marry him. Merope, was willing to marry Orion, but her father said, "NO!" to the marriage and found one reason after another for withholding his consent. Like Hercules, Orion was sent on various difficult errands. Merope's father kept promising to consider the marriage when Orion returned at the end of each task.

Finally for what Orion felt had to be the last task, Merope's father said, "If you will clear our island of all the wild beasts that infest it, so men can walk from one end to the other without danger, then I promise that you shall marry my daughter."

Orion went eagerly to the task. He loved hunting and no creature was too fierce to be his prey. Before long, he returned to Merope's father with the news that not a single wild beast remained upon the island. As proof, he brought the skins of each animal and heaped them at the feet of the king. Merope's father was stalling, and still not satisfied. "Wait a little longer," he said. "I still need more time to consider the marriage when Orion returned at the end of each task."

Orion realized that the King's promises were empty and that he was as far as ever from winning Merope for his bride.

Orion and Merope made plans to elope. In these times of gods and fairies, the plan was discovered and Orion was taken as a prisoner at the king's palace. Merope's father condemned the giant, Orion, to be blinded and cast out helpless on the seashore. Remember, Orion could walk on the surface of the water.

Alone and sightless, Orion wandered aimlessly. In the distance, he heard the sound of a blacksmith's hammer. The sound gave him hope, so he began following the sound, rejoicing as it grew louder and louder in his ears.

Eventually, Orion reached the island of Lemnos and the forge of the fire god, Hephaestus. Hephaestus was an artist creating gold and silver ornaments and armor for the gods. Orion asked Hephaestus to help him. Hephaestus, born lame and handicapped himself, took pity on this blinded giant. He gave Orion his servant Cedalion, the Cyclops, to use as a guide, and instructed them to proceed to the land of the rising sun. The mighty Orion lifted Cedalion to his shoulders so that they could move quickly. Together, they traveled far to the east and at last came to the top of a mountain in the land of the rising sun. As the first rays of the morning sun fell on his eyes, Orion's sight was restored.

Orion would take no more chances trying to win the hand of Merope, so he walked to the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea. He was happy hunting on the island, so naturally met Artemis, the goddess of wild animals and of the Moon. They like to hunt together. Artemis was supposed to drive her silver moon-chariot across the sky each night. Artemis and Orion were having so much fun hunting and playing together that, for several nights, she forgot to drive her chariot across the night sky.

Artemis' brother Apollo became angry that the moon was not shining. He set up a trick where Artemis shot an arrow through the heart of her friend Orion. It killed him. When she discovered what she had done, she sadly placed Orion's body in her chariot and drove it to the darkest part of the heavens so he would shine forever. The great hunter has a raised club, a great belt bearing a sword and is carrying a lion skin for his shield.
The Lazy Sisters and the Hard Working Young Men (Subaru and Mitsuboshi)

reference: Houei Nojiri "Hoshino Shinwa and Densetsushusei" (star mythology and legends) 70p-71p, Kousei Publishing, 1956

A long time ago, there were six sisters. In spring and summer, they played in the mountains and in autumn and winter, they went to villages and were given food to share. They always slept from the morning till the night. They were very lazy.

Three young men who lived next door to these six sisters always worked very hard from morning till night. Looking at the six sisters not working but always playing, these young men asked kindly, "Would you like to work once in a while? It must be unhealthy just playing around."

The six sisters replied in chorus, "None of your business! Working? It is foolish to work."

The three young men became angry. They tried to catch the sisters and give them a hard time. The sisters were very surprised and ran away at once.

The young men became even angrier and chased after the sisters, no matter where the sisters ran. At last the six sisters lost their way, so they used a small boat to escape to the sky. They paddled with their twelve arms and the young men could not catch up to them.

Observing this race, the Heavenly God suddenly appeared in front of the sisters and said,

"Hey, lazy sisters. Stop!" Immediately, the sisters' boat stopped.

"All of you have very bad attitudes. To improve and learn your lesson, you will be forced to stay there in the sky," said the Heavenly God. The six sisters were turned into six blurry stars.

Then the Heavenly God told the young men, "You three are very hard-working, therefore, you will be good models for all human beings. You will become beautiful stars in the sky."

So, the three young men became the three beautiful stars (Mitsuboshi-three stars) of Orion's belt. In the winter sky, it looks like Subaru (Pleiades - the six sisters' stars) appears in the sky being chased by Mitsuboshi (Orion's three belt stars).

Tanabata

A long time ago, there was a daughter of the sky god named Orihime living at the east side of Milky Way. As instructed by her father, Orihime spent each day weaving clothing. The clothing Orihime wove was as beautiful as the rainbow.

However, she worked every single day. Orihime had no other hobbies and did not even bother with her appearance or style. Feeling pity for her, the sky god sent Orihime to marry Hikoboshi who was living the other side of Milky Way.

But when Orihime got married, she stopped weaving and Hikoboshi did not work at all.

Finally, the sky god got angry and forced Orihime to return to the east side of Milky Way. As a punishment they were separated, but the sky god allowed them to meet once every year on July 7.

At this time, a bird named Kasasagi flew to the Milky Way and made a bridge for them to walk across. Orihime walked over this bridge to meet Hikoboshi.

If it was raining, Kasasagi was not strong enough to maintain the bridge and Orihime was unable to cross to the other side of Milky Way. She and Hikoboshi would have to wait for July 7 next year.
●忘却者の姉妹と働き者の若者（すばると三ツ星）

昔、六人の姉妹がおりました。春や夏は野山で遊び、秋や冬になると村に行って食べ物を分けてもらい、朝から晩までごろごろ寝てばかりという忘却者でした。その隣に住む三人の若者は、朝から晩まで一生懸命に仕事をする大変な働き者でした。若者たちは、隣の姉妹たちが何もしないで遊んでいるのを見て、

「どうだね、たまには働いてみたら。そんなに遊んでばかりいては、体の毒になるだろう。」

とやさしく言いました。すると姉妹は口をそろえて

「大きなお世話だよ。働くなって、馬鹿のすることだ。」

と言いました。

怒った三人の若者たちは、六人の姉妹たちをつかまえてひとり二目で

あわせようとしたので、姉妹たちは驚いて一目散に逃げて行きました。姉妹は逃げながらも若者に恶態をつき、それに腹をたてた若者はどこまでも妹たちを追いかけました。ついに逃げ場のなくなった妹たちは、近くにあった小舟に乗り込み空へ逃げていきました。

三人の若者もすぐさま船で追いかけましたが、妹たちは12本の手で船を

満くせで、若者たちはとうとう追いつけず、あきらめようとしました。

その様子を見ていた天の神様は、いきなり妹たちの船の前に立ちはこり

「こちら、忘却者もよし、止まれ。」

と言われました。たちまち姉妹の乗っている船は止まってしまいました。

「お前たちは心がけの悪いものだから、戒めのためにいつまでもそこに

いるがよい。」

と言いました。妹を六つの星（すばる）がやけた星に変えてしまいました。

それから神様は、三人の若者にむかって、

「お前たちはよく働いて心感なことである。よって、世の見本になるよう、

美しい星にしてあげよう。」

と言いました。こうして、若者たちは三つの美しい星（三ツ星）になり、

夜空を飾っています。

冬の夜空を見上げるとオリンコン座の三ツ星より少し先に、ほんやりした

すばるが昇り、三ツ星がすばるを西の空まで追いかけていくように見えるのです。

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●たなばた物語

昔、天の川の東に天帝の娘で、織女と呼ばれる大変美しい娘が

住んでおりました。

織女は天帝の言いつけて、毎日機織の仕事をしています。

その織女は織る布は、虹のように美しいものでした。

ところが毎日働いてばかりいるので、ほかに遊ぶこともなく、

身なりに気を使うこともしませんでした。

かわいそうに思った天帝は、天の川の向こう岸に住む牽牛を思い出し

織女を嫁がせました。

ところが結婚すると織女は機を織らなくなり、牽牛は仕事をしなくなりました。

ついに天帝もおこって、織女を東の岸に連れ戻してしまいました。

同じ年に天帝は、七月七日、年に一度だけ二人が逢うことを許しました。

この時には、カササギという鳥がやってきて、天の川に橋をかけてくれます。

織女たちは、このカササギの橋を渡って牽牛に逢いに行くのです。

しかしこの日は、雨が降るとカササギの力は弱くなり、織女は橋を渡れません。

また来年の七月七日まで待たなければならないのです。
A FEW WORDS ABOUT BRAZILIAN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

By Luiz Sampaio

BIBLIOGRAPHY


In the early sixteenth century, when the Portuguese arrived in Brazil, there lived in our forests more than five million Indians, organized in many different nations, characterized by different languages and cultural lives. They lived in harmony with the natural environment, the basis of their survival in each specific area of our large territory, which goes from the Equator line (in Amazony) to the sub-tropical zone in the south, and from the Atlantic to the Continental climate in the west areas.

The first document about Brazil written in a European language is the letter from the scrivener of the Portuguese squadron to the king of Portugal, in April 1500. This “birth certificate” of Brazil describes the healthy, kind and happy people who appeared from the forests to the beach. And beautiful! So beautiful that the Portuguese ladies would look ugly compared with these spontaneous women with whom the Portuguese mariners danced at the beach, to the sound of rhythmic music on primitive instruments.

After that first party came the first Jesuitic mass, the first European economic interests, the invasion of the native peoples’ lands, and the imposition of European culture. Today, some few 300,000 to 400,000 Indians survive, always fighting against woodcutters and miners to preserve their ancestral lands, which still are the basis of their threatened (maybe condemned) survival.

But, in spite of the physical and cultural destruction, the Indian culture has forever marked Brazilian society, deeply penetrating our present life in many aspects. Some popular children’s plays are based on the native culture. Our cuisine, medical practices (more and more people are turning to natural Indian medicines), and myths (including many supernatural entities which accompany children and adults in their lives in Brazil) owe their beginnings to the Indian culture. Perhaps most important is the Indian blood still flowing in the veins of most of our Northern population.

Indian cultural heritage preserves knowledge about the land and knowledge about the heavens, fundamental not only to their survival on this planet, but also to explain their origin below this sky and their destiny in other lands and skies.

Normally, Indian explanations about their past, present and future result from mythical projections of some special concrete aspects of their natural lives, always closely tied to environmental conditions. This basic aspect of attentive respect to nature makes Indian teaching highly contemporary. It is useful also for the survival of all the present population of Northern Brazil, mainly in the Amazonian region, where the natural environment is still a pre-condition for life.

In their mythology, some Indian groups came from the sky through an huge hole pursuing an enormous armadillo. Arriving here, their only contact with their people who remained behind is in the starry night, when the eyes of their ancestors and friends from the past, the stars, gleam brightly, looking for their lost hunters. In another story, some beautiful girls flow forever over their beloved warrior, who was transformed into the stone of a waterfall. And over this magic world, the stars acquire special meaning, forming constellations which reproduce aspects of terrestrial life in the heavens.
TEMBÉ ("flattened nose") is the name given in the early 20th century by the Europeans who first contacted this group. They call themselves TENETEHARA, "the people". Today Tembé Indians number about 1,100 people, living in the Amazonian Region, in a preserved area in the forests which protects their cultural traditions, although under unavoidable influence of modern life. This cultural relationship results in influences to both sides, bringing Tembé constellations to the daily life of farmers and fishermen, advising them about climate conditions important to these local populations.

The Tembé live about 3° south of the equator, so they observe a great slice of Southern and Northern sky, crossed by the "TAPI'IR RAPÉ" – the "Tapir's Way" (our Milky Way). The Tembé night sky is full of starry animals: the Tapir itself, the Brazilian ostrich, the joyful colibri, the slow land turtle that brings the rains, and the boat "YÁR RAGAPÁW".

Only two seasons are recognized by Amazonian people situated in the equatorial zone, whether Indian or not:

-Dry Season: The Tembé call it "Wiranú", and the general population calls it "Summer" (during "official" winter and spring times). It is a hot and humid period, with equatorial rain during the afternoons. This is the best season for the people, when the rivers are not so voluminous, making fishing easier, and the lands are drier, better for walking and for cultivation and hunting.

-Rainy Season: When it really rains in the equatorial sense, the season is "Amán" or amazonian "Winter." It corresponds to "official" summer and autumn, marked by inundations and by swarms of all kinds of mosquitos and other insects.

We reproduce here some constellations from the TEMBÉ-TENETEHARA sky.

The WIRANÚ (Brazilian ostrich), the biggest Amazonian bird, has its head formed by the Coal Sack in the Crux constellation.

Wiranú's tail is formed by the same stars as Scorpius' claws and one of its feet is formed by Scorpius' tail.

When the Wiranú constellation appears at nightfall, the dry season (Kwarahy – June till December) begins for the Tembé.

The TAPÍ'I constellation is formed by both bright starry and dark spots in the "Tapí'r Rapé". It is located in the Northern celestial hemisphere. The Tapí'i walks down the Milky Way from Pegasus during the rainy season (Amán – December till June).
The MAINÁMY (Colibri) flies on the Tembé sky in the middle of Tembé dry Wiraní season. Its arrival from the Southern skies is feasted with parties, dances and river baths. The special ceremony of the crossing of young Tembé girls from childhood to adult life, the “Young Woman Party,” is celebrated below the wings of the joyful colibri. The Mainâmy is located in the same region as Corvus.

The ZAUXÍHU RAPAGÁW (land turtle) is seen by the Tembé in the same region as Corona Borealis.

When the land turtle crosses the Northern sky, the Tembé know that it is slowly bringing the rainy Amán season.

Navigating in the skies, the YÁR RAPAGÁW crosses the Tapi’ir Rapé.

This constellation is an example of the cultural adaptation in the Amazonian Region.

The original “YÁR RAGAPÁW” (formed by parts of Ursa Major and Leo Minor) was a typical Tembé paddle boat, but over time the original “Yár Ragapáw” has been equipped with modern accessories, receiving helm, mast and sail, and transforming itself into the “Boat Constellation” well known by all the fishermen in the Amazonian region.

Nowadays the Yár Rapagáw’s mast indicates the North direction to the whole Amazonian population, Tembé or not, and its arrival in the sky foretells the coming of the rains.