

Orion the Giant *(El gigante Orión)*

Story from Greek Mythology

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A long time ago, a giant named Orion lived in Greece. He spent his life hunting with his dogs. He lived in a large cave close to another cave where a giant named Atlante lived with his wife and his seven daughters, the Pleiades.

One day Orion saw Merope, one of the Pleiades. She was sunbathing. Orion was overwhelmed by Merope's beauty and fell in love with her. Merope saw him and fell in love too. But Atlante had other plans for Merope. He planned to marry her to the son of a very rich giant who lived far away in another forest.

One day Atlante saw Orion and Merope out walking together and their love made him furious. He prepared a potion that he gave Orion. Atlante wanted to make Orion blind so that he could not see Merope anymore. Orion drank the mixture and lost his sight. Atlante told him "You will not recover your sight until you find the light of dawn. Walk until you find it. Then, when you return, you will have to fight all of the animals you meet on the way."

The blind Orion could not travel alone so he sought the help of a young boy. Perched on Orion's shoulders, the boy led him East until they found beautiful colours of the light of dawn. Then Orion was able to see again.

On the journey home, Orion confronted a hare and a bull. He defeated both, but when he was close to his cave a scorpion stung him in the foot and left its poisonous sting stuck in his skin. Feeling that he was going to die, Orion asked Zeus, the father of all gods, to transform him into a constellation of stars so he could see his beloved Merope. Zeus kindly fulfilled Orion's wish. When Merope found out, she and her sisters asked to be close to Orion. Zeus obliged and turned them into stars too. He did the same to Orion's dogs and the animals that had crossed the giant's path on the way back from the seeking the light of dawn.

Since that time, on calm winter nights, it is possible to see Orion with his drawn bow, his two dogs, the rabbit and the bull. Close to them, the Pleiades watch the giant. What never appears in the night sky at the same time as Orion is the constellation of the Scorpion, Orion's enemy. When one is visible, the other is not. In the sky these eternal enemies will watch over us forever.

Constellations

If we look at the sky at night, we can see as many as 6000 stars. To help people find their bearings our ancestors traced imaginary lines between stars to form shapes called constellations. Orion is one of them. Stars in Orion have different colours. Rigel (Orion's right foot) is a white-blue supergiant star and Betelgeuse (Orion's left shoulder) is a red supergiant almost at the end of its life.

