

Orion and Scorpius

Orion and Scorpius are two of the most easily recognized constellations in the sky. Orion is best seen in the northern winter; Scorpius is a summertime constellation.

Orion was a skilled hunter. He was also boastful, asserting that no animal alive could harm him. Juno, wife of Jupiter, disliked mortal men, especially boastful men, so she decided to teach Orion a lesson. She placed a scorpion on the path that Orion took daily to his hunting grounds. As you might expect, Orion trod upon the scorpion, which stung him and killed him.

But the story does not end here, for the gods were continuously quarreling among themselves. Diana, goddess of the moon and the hunt, fancied Orion, the greatest mortal hunter. They had often hunted together at night, neglecting her lunar duties (hence the dark nights near the new moon). She insisted that his likeness be memorialized in the sky, with his hunting dogs (Canis Major and Canis Minor) at his feet, where all could see it and remember his prowess.

This did not please Juno, who insisted upon similar treatment for the Scorpion. Was it not a mightier hunter to slay the great Orion? Jupiter agreed to similarly honor the Scorpion, but in one of his wisest decisions placed the two constellations on opposite sides of the celestial sphere, where they cannot bother each other. Even today, one does not see both Orion and Scorpius together in the night sky.

But just in case the Scorpion decides to roam, Sagittarius the archer has his arrow trained on Antares, the red heart of the Scorpion.