Deep-thinking Chiron is the civilized Centaur who trained several famous disciples, being known for his wisdom and justice. Chiron, who was not a drunkard like other centaurs, never used his weapons against a man. Instead he spent his Old Age learning about herbs, and teaching to play the lyre to his pupils.

Born a Centaur

Chiron was born in very ancient times, for some have said that he was conceived at the time when Zeus was hiding in Crete, and his father Cronos, anxious to devour the little god, was looking for him throughout the earth. And Chiron, they say, was born a Centaur because Cronos begot him in a horse’s shape. Without Chiron, they say, there would not be art of healing. For Asclepius, despite the fact that he was the son of Apollo, the god of healing, learned medicine from the centaur Chiron. And as it has been pointed out, the art that Asclepius’ sons Machaon and Podalirius performed at the time of the Trojan War, as when Machaon cured Menelaus, was the same art that Chiron had taught to his disciple Asclepius. But Chiron taught the art of healing to his other disciples too, for that is what the wounded Eurypylus says to Patroclus when they were fighting at Troy:

"I want you to cut out this arrow from my thigh, wash off the blood with warm water and spread soothing ointment on the wound. They say you have some excellent prescriptions that you learnt from Achilles, who was taught by Chiron ..." (Eurypylus 1 to Patroclus 1. Homer, Iliad 11.829).

Lives with Wife and Mother

Although it has been told that Philyra was turned into a tree when she discovered that she had given birth to a monster, others say that Chiron lived in a cave in Mount Pelion, which is in Magnesia (Thessaly), with both his wife and his mother, and that is what Jason, who was one of the disciples of this Centaur, says:

"... I shall give proof of Chiron’s training; for I come from his cave, from the presence of Chariclo and Philyra, where the holy daughters of the Centaur raised me." (Jason to Pelias 1. Pindar, Pythian Odes 4.112).

Chiron and Cyrene

Chiron is regarded as a civilized Centaur, sometimes wiser than the gods, and certainly wiser than men, whom he surpasses in justice. As it is told, not even Apollo knew, or seemed to know, who Cyrene was when he found her near Mount Pelion without spears wrestling alone with a lion. But the god asked the Centaur to leave his cave, and tell him all about her. And Chiron showed amazement at the god’s question:

"Do you ask of the maiden’s birth? You who know the end supreme of all things, and all the ways that lead thereto, the number of the leaves that the earth puts forth in spring, the number of the sands that, in the sea and the rivers, are driven before the waves ..." (Chiron to Apollo. Pindar, Pythian Odes 9.45).

However, Apollo was not ignorant, says Chiron, but instead reluctant to show his love openly:

"Secret, O Apollo! are the keys of wise Persuasion, that unlock the shrine of love; and both gods and men blush to take the pleasure of a bed for the first time openly. For even in your case, for whom it is unlawful to touch on falsehood, a gentle impulse has swayed you to dissemble your words." (Chiron to Apollo Pindar, Pythian Odes 9.39).
After this, Apollo carried Cyrene off to that part of the land of Libya where in later times he founded a city and named it, after her, Cyrene. And this was decided that very day when Apollo saw the girl, for as it is said:

"Swift is the achievement, short are the ways of gods, when bent on speed." (Pindar, Pythian 9.68).

Cyrene, who was daughter of King Hypseus of the Lapiths, gave birth to Aristaeus, who himself became a disciple of Chiron, and the discoverer of honey and the olive.

**Mortally Wounded**

Chiron was mortally wounded in the following way: Heracles, in his wanderings, came to the cave of the Centaur Pholus, who received him and set roast meat before him. Heracles, then, asked for wine, but Pholus said that he feared to open the jar since it belonged to all centaurs in common. After some discussion on this matter, the jar was opened and the centaurs, scenting the smell, arrived armed at the cave of Pholus. A battle ensued, and Heracles shot and repelled many of them, who took refuge with Chiron. At that point, Heracles shot an arrow at Elatus, which passed through his arm, sticking in Chiron’s knee. Distressed at this, Heracles applied a medicine which the Centaur gave him. But the wound was incurable, because the arrows of Heracles had been dipped in the gall of the Hydra, and were therefore utterly poisonous. However, others have said that it was when Heracles once visited Chiron and they were examining his arrows, that one of them fell on the Centaur’s foot, bringing about his death. And still others have said that Chiron himself tried to draw the bow, and the arrow, slipping from his hand, fell on his foot, wounding him.

**His Fate Foretold by his Daughter**

In any case Chiron, who was in pain, wished to die, but, being immortal, he could not. So when Heracles, after some time, released Prometheus, he presented Chiron to Zeus, who consented to die in Prometheus’s stead. This had been prophesied by Chiron’s daughter, the seeress Ocyrrhoe:

"You also, dear father, who are now immortal and destined by the law of birth to last through all the ages, shall some day long for power to die, when you will be in agony with all your limbs burning with the fatal Hydra’s blood. But at last, from immortal the gods shall make you capable of death, and the three goddesses shall loose your thread." (Ocyrrhoe to Chiron. Ovid, Metamorphoses 2.649).

This genial Centaur, who renounced immortality, reared famous disciples, and surpassed men in justice, conscientiousness and diligence, was put among the stars, and is known today as the constellation Centaur (Centaurus).

**Citation**

CHIRON IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY
By Colin Quartermain

Chiron was the wisest of centaurs in Greek mythology. A friend to many famous heroes, Chiron would also act as tutor to many of the most famous figures from Greek myths.

THE CENTAUR CHIRON
Chiron was a centaur of Greek mythology, meaning he was a half-man, half-horse figure; but Chiron was different to most of the other centaurs written about, for Chiron was civilized and learned whilst other centaurs were regarded as savages.

To explain the difference between Chiron and other centaurs it was said that Chiron had different parents than most other centaurs, for while most were considered the children of Ixion and Nephele, Chiron was named as a son of the Titan Cronus and the Oceanid Philyra. In mating with Philyra, Chiron took the form of a steed, hence why his child was born a centaur.

Being the son of the supreme deity of the day, Cronus, also ensured that Chiron was regarded as immortal.

CHIRON THE EDUCATED
Chiron would become well versed in many different academic fields, including medicine, music, prophecy and hunting, and it was said by some that Chiron was the inventor of medicine and surgery. Such knowledge and “gifts” were commonly said to be given by the gods, and so it was said in some sources that Chiron was tutored by Artemis and Apollo, although others tell of Chiron simply studying and learning to gain all that he knew.

CHRION UPON MOUNT PELION
Chiron would reside upon Mount Pelion in Magnesia, where, in his cave, he studied and learned. Upon Mount Pelion, Chiron also found himself a wife, for Chiron would wed Chariclo, a nymph of Mount Pelion.

This marriage was said to have brought forth a number of offspring. One child was the daughter Melanippe, also known as Ocyrhoe, who after being seduced by Aeolus, was transformed into a mare so that her father would not know that she was pregnant. Although, some tell of her transformation being a punishment after she went too far in using her prophetic abilities to reveal the secrets of the gods.

A son, named Carystus, was also born, with Carystus being regarded as a rustic god associated with the island of Euboea.

It was also said by some that Chiron was father to Endeis by Chariclo, although some name the father as Sciron. Endeis was famously the first wife of Aeacus, and mother of Peleus and Telamon.

Additionally, an unspecified number of nymphs were also born to Chiron and Chariclo, these nymphs being named the Pelionides.

CHIRON AND PELEUS
Potentially, Chiron was the grandfather of Peleus, and there was a close association in the tales of Greek mythology between the two.

Peleus was staying in Iolcus when King Acastus’ wife, Astydameia, attempted to seduce the Argonaut. Peleus spurned the advances of Astydameia, and so she told her husband that Peleus had tried to rape her.
Now Acastus could not simply kill his guest, for that was a crime that could bring down the vengeance of the Erinyes (the Furies) upon him, and so Acastus planned a method by which others could be blamed for Peleus’ death.

Acastus and Peleus went hunting upon Mount Pelion, but overnight Acastus secretly took Peleus’ sword, hiding it away, and then abandoned Peleus as he slept. The plan was that the savage centaurs who resided upon Mount Pelion would find the unarmed Peleus and kill him.

It was of course not an uncivilized centaur who discovered Peleus for it was Chiron who came upon the hero, and having restored his sword to him, Chiron welcomed Peleus into his home.

It was also said that it was Chiron who told Peleus how the hero could make the Nereid Thetis his wife; and upon the centaur’s advice, Peleus tied up Thetis so no matter what shape she took she was still bound, and eventually Thetis agreed to be Peleus’ wife.

At the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, Chiron was amongst the guests, and the centaur presented to Peleus a spear made from ash, which had been polished by Athena and given its metal point by Hephaestus. This spear would later be owned by the son of Peleus, Achilles.

Achilles would be a famous student of Chiron, for when Thetis fled from Peleus’ palace, having been discovered trying to make her son immortal, Achilles was sent to Chiron to be raised, and as Chariclo acted as foster mother, Chiron taught Achilles in medicine and hunting.

THE STUDENTS OF CHIRON
Chiron had been a tutor to many heroes before he taught Achilles, and having welcomed the Argonauts to his home during their adventures, it was said that a number of these heroes had been taught by the centaur; the most famous student of Chiron amongst the Argonauts being Jason, who had been sent to Mount Pelion by his father, Aeson.

When Coronis was killed by Artemis, Apollo took the still unborn child, Asclepius from the womb of Coronis, and gave his son to Chiron and Chariclo to be raised.

As he grew up, Asclepius was taught everything that Chiron knew about herbs, medicine and surgery, and this became the basis through which Asclepius became known as the Greek god of Medicine.

Now it was commonly said that the skill of Asclepius exceeds that of his teacher, but the medical skill of Chiron was sufficient to heal Phoenix, when Phoenix was blinded by his father Amyntor.

All of the heroes taught by Chiron though had some understanding of advanced medicine.

Now it was also said that Aristaeus received much of his knowledge of rustic arts and prophecy from Chiron, and that his son, Actaeon, was taught how to hunt by Chiron as well.

Patroclus, the lifelong friend of Achilles, was also tutored by Chiron at the same time as the son of Peleus, as perhaps was the cousin of Achilles, Telamonian Ajax. It is also said by some sources that the most famous of all Greek heroes, Heracles was also tutored by Chiron, although is not universally agreed upon, but certainly Heracles was involved in the death of Chiron.

THE DEATH OF CHIRON
Now Chiron was said to be immortal, and yet still he died.

Heracles was being hosted by another civilized centaur Pholus, when the opening of a jar of wine attracted all the savage centaurs to Pholus’ cave. Heracles was forced to fight the wild centaurs off, and in the end, he unleashed many of his poisoned arrows.
One such arrow passed through the arm of the centaur Elatus and entered the knee of Chiron. The poison of the Hydra was sufficient to kill any mortal, and indeed an arrowhead accidentally caused the death of Pholus, but Chiron was not a mortal, and so rather than dying, Chiron was wracked with unbearable pain.

Even with Heracles helping, Chiron was unable to cure himself, and for nine days Chiron suffered the pain. Then realizing that there was but one way to end the pain, Chiron asked Zeus to remove his immortality, and taking pity on his kin, Zeus did so, and so Chiron died from his wound, and was subsequently placed amongst the stars as the constellation Centaurus.

Now some tell of how it was Heracles who went to his father to arrange for Chiron to give up his immortality, and in doing so struck a deal whereby Chiron died, and Prometheus was released from his eternal torture and imprisonment; although it is not exactly clear as to why Zeus would agree to such a deal, aside from the fact that Heracles was his favored son.

**Citation**

Who is Chiron?
Chiron is a wise and noble-hearted centaur, often given charge of the young heroes of Greek mythology. With his many talents and his gentle nature, he can train the heroes in everything from the deadly arts of hunting and archery to the delicate arts of music and healing.

Characteristics
Physical Description
Chiron is described as a centaur, a creature with a man’s head and torso melting into the powerful body of a horse. However, the nobility of his spirit easily eclipses his fellow centaurs, and his appearance bears telltale signs of his superiority.

Unlike other centaurs, who have four horse legs, Chiron’s forelegs are human and hind-legs are horse. His face is an image of strength and classical beauty, lacking the pointed ears and wild hair that give other centaurs a roguish look, and he frequently wears clothes, even laurel wreaths, which show how civilized he is in comparison to his brethren.

Personality
Of all the characters in Greek mythology, Chiron has perhaps the most pure and selfless heart. You’ll never find him involved in the tricks or squabbles of the other immortals; his dignity holds him above their schemes.

First and foremost, this magnificent centaur has a teacher’s heart. He is incredibly intelligent and far-sighted, yet he is also humble and nurturing. This rare combination makes him a highly sought-after instructor—but he welcomes everyone into his home, no matter how weak or lowly they might seem. Everyone who leaves his home, after living under his care and guidance, is stronger and wiser than they were when they arrived.

Second, he is brave and self-sacrificing. He risks his life for his friends and students on multiple occasions, and ultimately, he chooses to sacrifice his immortality to save someone else’s life.

Special Abilities
Chiron is a talented archer, hunter, musician, oracle, and healer. His skill with a bow and arrow is unsurpassable, although his student Achilles became sporting rivals. His favorite instrument is the lyre, which he plays flawlessly, even by Apollo’s standards. As an oracle, he has knowledge of hidden secrets and future events, which he demonstrated when he told Peleus how to make the ravishingly beautiful sea nymph, Thetis, his wife.

Still, the mighty centaur’s most prolific talent is his healing ability. He knows all the herbs that grow in the pristine woodlands of his home on Mount Pelion, and he can use them to great effect. He has healed many deep wounds for his students, but his most famous accomplishment was restoring sight to Phoenix, a hero who had gone blind.

Related Creatures
Chiron’s lineage is different from the other centaurs, which may explain some of the differences between them. His father was Cronus, one of the original titans who ruled before the gods, and his mother was Philyra, a beautiful ocean nymph. Unfortunately, Cronus and Philyra were caught in the middle of their tryst by Rhea, Cronus’ wife. Disgraced, the Titan turned himself into a stallion and galloped away. Months later, when Philyra gave birth to their son, the baby’s form was half horse. Philyra
was revolted by her child’s monstrous form; she abandoned him and begged the gods to transform her into another form, so that she could forget her disgrace. The gods turned her into a Linden tree.

Poor Chiron was effectively orphaned, but luck quickly turned in his favor. The radiant god Apollo found the baby and decided to take him in as his own son. He taught the orphan how to repress his animal urges and live nobly, in a way that would highlight his humanity, even his divinity. Apollo also taught the young centaur about music and medicine. Apollo’s twin sister, Artemis, approved of his project and decided to come aboard as the orphan’s foster mother. She taught him about archery and hunting.

After he grew up, the orphan made his foster parents proud by becoming a revered teacher. He was always eager to return the kindness that Apollo and Artemis had shown him, and he took on many young students of his own, including Achilles, Ajax, Heracles, Jason, Peleus, Perseus, and Theseus.

In addition to his students, the centaur had biological children of his own. He was married to a nymph named Chariclo, and with her he had three daughters, Melanippe, Endeis, and Ocyrhoe, and one son, Carystus.

**Cultural Representation**

**Origin**

Chiron appears in the epic poems of ancient Greek writers, including Ovid, Pindar, Homer, and Hesiod, which date all the way back to the 7th or 8th century AD.

Still, some scholars believe that this unusual centaur might have had a pre-Greek origin, which could explain some of the peculiarities that separate him from traditional Greek centaurs. He may have been a god from Thessaly, the nation that surrounded Chiron’s legendary home, Mount Pelion, before it was conquered by the Greeks.

**Famous Myths**

Chiron’s life is well documented by Greek poets and scholars. There are stories from each chapter of his life, from his unlikely conception and birth to his heartrending death.

The centaur’s relationship with Peleus, a Greek king and hero, winds a long thread through his fabled life. Their story began when Peleus and his friend, Acastus, went hunting in the wilderness. Unknown to Peleus, he was travelling with a traitor; Acastus was plotting against Peleus’ life because his wife had fallen in love with the new hero. The two friends laid down in the brush to take a nap, but when Peleus awoke, both Acastus and his sword were missing. Peleus was left helpless and would have died if Chiron had not found his sword, returned it to him, and cared for him until he returned home. Later, Peleus returned to consult the centaur, whom he considered a kind friend, about a new problem: he was desperately in love with an ocean nymph, Thetis, but he didn’t know how to win her as his wife. Chiron told him where he could find the nymph and how he could win her for a bride, and with the centaur’s guidance, he was successful. The couple even held their wedding, a sumptuous event which was attended by many of the gods, in Chiron’s cave on Mount Pelion. Later, Peleus sent his and Thetis’ only son, Achilles, to be taught by the centaur.

Another important relationship in Chiron’s life was with his daughter, Melanippe. Among all his daughters, Melanippe was the most beautiful and the most gifted. She was deeply prophetic, and she liked to predict the fates of the young heroes who passed through her father’s cave. She even foretold her own father’s death, although the vision caused her enormous grief (according to some legends, she grieved so much that she died and became an image in the stars). Intelligent though she was, Melanippe was unable to resist Aeolus, grandson of Zeus and son of Greek’s most legendary beauty, Helen, when he came into the wilderness to woo her. Soon, she was pregnant with Aeolus’ child, and she ran away from home to conceal the pregnancy from her father, who had raised all his daughters as virgins devoted to Artemis. Chiron went looking for his daughter, and she begged the gods to hide her in any way. Thus, they transformed her into a black mare so she could give birth. After giving birth, she passed into the stars.
The story which brought Chiron’s wonderful life to an end shows the final height of his kindheartedness. Yet another Greek hero, Heracles, was visiting his cave, and the two adventurers began to examine Heracles’ weapons. Heracles was eager to show off a set of arrows, poisoned with venom from the monstrous hydra, which he had recently killed. By a freak accident (some myths say that Chiron dropped one of arrows, others that Heracles accidentally released it when he was testing his bow), Chiron was pierced by one of the poison arrows. The wound didn’t kill him because he was immortal, but it caused him terrible, debilitating pain. Remarkably, the wounded centaur wasn’t angry with Heracles. Instead, he tried to comfort the young hero, who was horrified by what he had done to such a great teacher. After days of suffering, the centaur came up with a plan that would relieve his pain and Heracles guilt; he volunteered to help Heracles accomplish his final great task, freeing Prometheus, which required an immortal life to be sacrificed for Prometheus’s sake. Thus, the wise and gentle teacher, who had trained so many of Greece’s heroes, died, and Heracles was able to free Prometheus. As a token of their admiration for this final heroic act, the gods placed the centaur in the sky as a constellation.

**Visual Arts**

Early Greek pottery is rife with imagery of Chiron and his students, especially Achilles. In these early images, the noble teacher appears just as he does in the epic poems; he has a human body, complete with two human legs, and a horse’s hindquarters are attached to his waist. In later Greek artwork, he has begun to appear more centaur-like, having all four horse legs, and by the time he was adopted by the Romans, he had permanently lost his human legs—although he still wore cloaks and laurel to symbolize his nobility.

**Citation**

CHIRON

He was one of the Centaurs, but unlike the others who were violent fierce creatures, he was known everywhere for his goodness and wisdom, so much so that the young sons of heroes were entrusted to him to train and teach. Achilles was his pupil and Aesculapius, the great physician; the famous hunter Actaeon, too, and many another. He alone among the Centaurs was immortal and yet in the end he died and went to the lower world. Indirectly and unintentionally Hercules was the cause of his dying. He had stopped in to see a Centaur who was a friend of his, Pholus, and being very thirsty he persuaded him to open a jar of wine which was the common property of all the Centaurs. The aroma of the wonderful liquor informed the others what had happened and they rushed down to take vengeance on the offender. But Hercules was more than a match for them all. He fought them off, but in the fight he accidentally wounded Chiron, who had taken no part in the attack. The wound proved to be incurable and finally Zeus permitted Chiron to die rather than live forever in pain.

CLYTIE

Her story is unique, for instead of a god in love with an unwilling maiden, a maiden is in love with an unwilling god. Clytie loved the Sun-god and she found nothing to love in her. She pined away sitting on the ground out-of-doors where she could watch him, turning her face and following him with her eyes as he journeyed over the sky. So gazing she was changed into a flower, the sunflower, which ever turns toward the sun.

DRYOPE

Her story, like a number of others, shows how strongly the ancient Greeks disapproved of destroying or injuring a tree.

With her sister Iole she went one day to a pool intending to make garlands for the nymphs. She was carrying her little son, and seeing near the water a lotus tree full of bright blossoms she plucked some of them to please the baby. To her horror she saw drops of blood flowing down the stem. The tree was really the nymph, Lotis, who fleeing from a pursuer had taken refuge in this form. When Dryope, terrified at the ominous sight, tried to hurry away, her feet would not move; they seemed rooted in the ground. Iole watching her helplessly saw bark begin to grow upward covering her body. It had reached her face when her husband came to the spot with her father. Iole cried out what had happened and the two, rushing to the tree, embraced the still warm trunk and watered it with their tears. Dryope had time only to declare that she had done no wrong intentionally and to beg them to bring the child often to the tree to play in its shade, and some day to tell him her story so that he would think whenever he saw the spot: “Here in this tree-trunk my mother is hidden.” “Tell him too,” she said, “never to pluck flowers, and to think every bush may be a goddess in disguise.” Then she could speak no more; the bark closed over her face. She was gone forever.

EPIMENIDES

A figure of mythology only because of the story of his long sleep. He lived around 600 B.C. and is said as a boy when looking for a lost sheep to have been overcome by a slumber which lasted for fifty-seven years. On waking he continued
Chapter 2

HALF-HUMANS AND OTHER ODD CREATURES

According to the ancient Greek storytellers, in the Age of Heroes there existed a race of beings called centaurs. Each had the upper body of a human, including a man's head, chest, and arms. But a centaur's lower body was equine. It featured four legs, ending in hooves, and a bushy tail.

Apollo's Offspring

A story from that era said that these odd-looking creatures had been spawned by a human named Centaurus. His father was the god Apollo. One of the most versatile of the Greek deities, Apollo oversaw prophecy, healing, poetry, archery, and music. The story claimed that Apollo once had an affair with an attractive nymph named Stilbe. She lived near Mount Peliion, in Thessaly. That region, in central Greece, was known for its many fine horses. Soon after her union with the handsome Apollo, Stilbe gave birth to Centaurus.

An alternative myth said that Centaurus was the son of a man named Ixion and a cloud that a god had disguised to look like a woman. Whoever Centaurus' parents were, as a young man he mated with several Thessalian mares. They then gave birth to the centaurs.

As it turned out, these horse-men did not reflect very well on their father or grandparents. A majority of the centaurs were vulgar, messy, and foul-mouthed. They spent much of their time partying, drinking, and telling one another jokes and racy stories.

Though crude, the centaurs were normally no threat to their human neighbors. In fact, the two races often got along quite well. One exception was when the horse-men got drunk, at which time they could get both unruly and quarrelsome.

Centaurs and Drink

A tribe of Greeks known as the Lapiths saw the drunken centaurs in action. The Lapiths dwelled in a part of Thessaly not far from the caves and groves where the centaurs made their own homes. The king of the Lapiths, Pirithous, was a warm, hospitable man. So when he was planning his wedding feast, he thought it would be a neighborly gesture to invite the centaurs.
Most of the horse-men gladly accepted the invitation. At first the festivities were pleasant and cordial. But after a while the centaurs did what they did best. They partied hard and got drunk. Suddenly they started saying that they owned the Lapiths' land. Not only that, the centaurs owned the people who lived on that land. Although these claims were false, at that moment the tipsy horse-men believed them. So they tried to grab and run off with the Lapith women. One centaur, Eurytion, went so far as to seize Pirithous' bride, Hippodamia.

**The Centauromachy**

Some of the Lapith men tried to reason with the centaurs. But this proved fruitless. So the men lost their tempers, drew their swords, and attacked the centaurs. What had started as a happy celebration quickly turned into a bloody fight. The Lapith women were rescued but dozens of centaurs were killed or wounded in the process. Later Greeks called this battle the Centauromachy, which they frequently depicted in paintings and sculptures. Some of the magnificent sculpted figures on Greece's most famous temple—the Parthenon, in Athens—were Lapiths clashing with centaurs.

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**A Poor Host**

Another peaceful occasion that escalated into a brawl between humans and centaurs involved the renowned Greek hero Heracles (Hercules to the Romans). One day the barrel-chested strongman was passing through an area in which many centaurs lived. A horse-man named Pholus recognized Heracles. Hoping to make a good impression, Pholus invited the traveler to dinner. Also invited were several other centaurs, who viewed Heracles as a celebrity and wanted to meet him.

Unfortunately for all involved, Pholus was not a very good host. Like most centaurs, he had poor table manners, and he didn't know how to treat human guests. As a result, Heracles felt offended. An argument erupted and it soon led to a fight in which some of the horse-men were killed. Pholus was among the casualties.

**The Civilized Centaur**

One of the centaurs was very much unlike his equine brethren. His name was Chiron and he lived in a large cave on a slope of Mount Echion. A highly accomplished individual, he was known all across Greece for his kindness, compassion, wisdom, and generosity. Chiron was the son of Cronus, leader of the first race of gods, the Titans, and a nymph named Philyra. Among the civilized centaur's closest friends was the god Apollo. Like Apollo, Chiron became adept at archery and the arts of healing and music.
Because Chiron was so civilized and wise, kings, queens, and on occasion even gods, sent their sons to live with him in his cave. There he tutored them in all manner of physical and intellectual pursuits. As a result boys who already possessed much potential were able to realize it. They became outstanding or famous, or both, for their abilities and achievements. They included Achilles, the most formidable of the Greeks who fought at Troy; the great hunter Actaeon; Asclepius, the god of healing; and the hero Jason, who captured the fabulous Golden Fleece.

**Release from Pain**
As the son of a Titan, Chiron enjoyed the gift of immortality. However, he could feel pain. This became a serious problem when, according to legend, he tried to remove an arrow from a wounded fellow centaur. It turned out that the arrow had been dipped in poison. So when the tip scratched Chiron's finger, he became ill. His pain grew so terrible that he wanted to die, so he gave his immortality to someone else. Ancient accounts vary on who the recipient was. In this way the most famous and best-liked centaur died.

**Griffins: Strange Beaked Beasts**
Centaurs, satyrs, and flying horses featured prominently in ancient Greek art. Their images were frequently shown on vases, bowls, and walls. Another fabulous creature that appeared often in both paintings and sculptures was the griffin. It had the body of a lion and the head, wings, and beak of an eagle.

Griffins had no major roles in any Greek myths. But they were mentioned in several classical Greek writings. Supposedly they lived far to the north of Greece in a land few humans had visited. They were said to guard a large collection of gold and other valuables there.

It appears that Greek images of griffins were based on weird-looking skeletons found in the distant region, which was east of the Black Sea. The skeletons belonged to lion-sized animals with four legs. They also had big, birdlike beaks. Modern experts think these skeletons were those of a small dinosaur called the protoceratops. The Greeks knew nothing about dinosaurs, of course. So they did not realize the bones were millions of years old. They assumed they belonged to a bizarre creature still living beyond the Black Sea, and they called it the griffin.
CHIRON

A leading figure among the centaurs, an immortal half-human, half-horse; sage, prophet, teacher, and healer.

Chiron was unusual among the centaurs because he did not lead an indulgent lifestyle of chaotic drinking and carousing (most centaurs were notorious for their violence and vulgarity when they were drunk). By contrast, Chiron was known for his wisdom and good behavior. He was tutor to many Greek heroes, including Heracles, Achilles, Theseus, and Jason, with the ability to enable his pupils to reach their highest potential and discover their true destiny. He was also an astrologer who could read a person's fate in the stars.

Chiron was conceived when Cronus took the form of a horse and coupled with the nymph Philyra, which accounts for his different ancestry from the other centaurs. As a child of Cronus, Chiron was immortal, but he nobly sacrificed his immortality after being wounded in a skirmish. This happened when his former pupil Heracles was dining with his friend Pholus in a cave; vapors from their wine wafted outside and intoxicated a bevy of centaurs gathered there. Driven wild by the heady fumes, the centaurs attacked the cave with rocks and branches, while Heracles fought back by shooting arrows poisoned with Hydra's blood. During the conflict, an arrow struck Chiron by mistake. Although he was a master of herbal medicine, the man-horse was unable to heal himself. His agony prompted Prometheus to appeal to Zeus to shed Chiron's immortality so that he could die. Zeus agreed. As a token of respect for Chiron, Zeus gave the honorable centaur pride of place in the heavens by setting him as the constellation Sagittarius.