

Mid-September through October, high in the west around 9 p.m.; November, lower in the west-northwest around 8 p.m.

Find out more at StarDate Online...

You can hear StarDate on the radio, and find us online at <http://stardate.org>.

Below are just a few StarDate programs related to the seasonal highlights:

Andromeda Galaxy October 28, 2003

Albireo June 11, 2004

UN-Habitable Zone March 12, 2002

Cygnus, the Swan

At first glance, Cygnus looks more like a cross than a swan and in fact, it's also known as the Northern Cross. Fainter stars extend the swan's wings. The bright blue-white star Deneb marks the swan's tail, and Albireo is at the head.

Albireo

Looking through a small telescope at low power, you can see a blue and gold pair of stars orbiting around a common center of gravity, or barycenter. Many stars are not alone — they have companions. Astronomers observe binary or multiple-star systems to track their orbital motion and calculate the masses of the stars.

Hercules

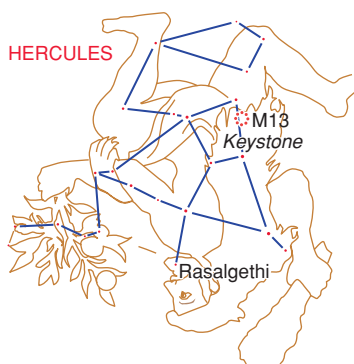
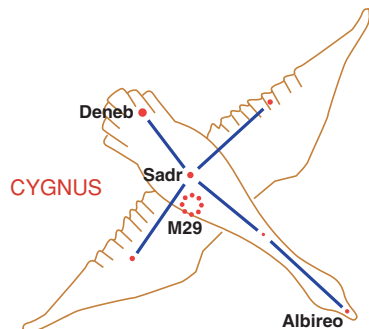
A rectangle of four stars, called the Keystone, forms Hercules' torso. On the map he appears upside-down, with an arm extending toward Lyra and Cygnus. A glorious, densely packed cluster of stars appears midway on the side of the Keystone opposite Cygnus and Lyra.

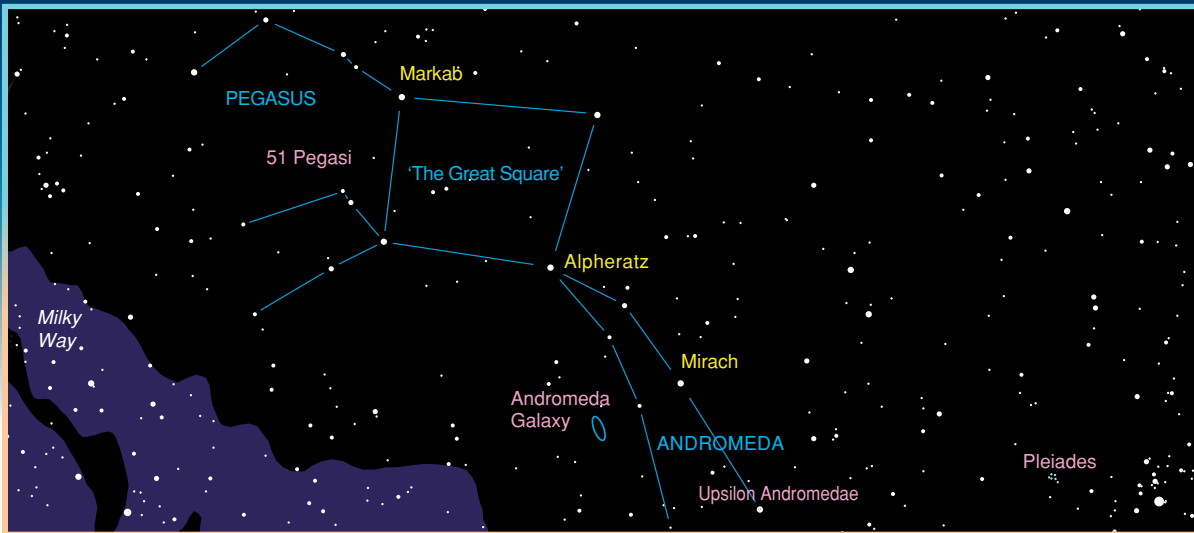
Globular Cluster M13

Buzzing with millions of stars, this cluster is one of perhaps 200 that orbit in the outskirts of our galaxy. Each of the stars in the cluster has its own orbit around the core — some falling in, others zipping out. M13 is located about 21,000 light years away. Binoculars will reveal the core of the cluster, while a telescope will show a halo of stars scattered around the core.

Milky Way

If you live far away from bright lights, you can see our own galaxy, the Milky Way, stretching high overhead and running through Cygnus. The collective light of millions of far-away stars inside our galaxy makes the misty glow. Most stars in our galaxy lie in a broad, flat disk. The Milky Way is our view of this huge disk of stars. Our solar system is nestled inside this disk, halfway from the center of the Milky Way.





Late December through January, high overhead around 7-8 p.m.; February, lower in the west-northwest around 7 p.m.

Pegasus, the Flying Horse

A box of four stars called the “Great Square” traces the body of the horse. Markab (Arabic for “the saddle”) is the brightest of these stars, at the base of Pegasus’ neck.

51 Pegasi

In 1995, a team of astronomers concluded that a half-Jupiter-mass planet orbits the star 51 Pegasi, a dim nearby star in the constellation Pegasus. This star is difficult to see with your eyes alone, but you can roughly locate it among the brighter stars of Pegasus.

Andromeda

What appears to be Pegasus’ hind legs in a draping “A” shape is actually another constellation, Andromeda. Princess Andromeda’s head lies at Alpheratz, with her feet at the bottom of the “A.”

Andromeda Galaxy (M31)

The Andromeda galaxy is our nearest large galactic neighbor. In binoculars and small telescopes, it looks like a fuzzy light patch with a bright center. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, and the Andromeda galaxy are the dominant members of our local galactic neighborhood.

The Pleiades (M45)

The Pleiades, otherwise known as the “Seven Sisters,” is a cluster of stars about 400 light-years away. The Seven Sisters are the bright blue-white stars you can see on a clear dark night. If you can find six, you have good eyesight and a dark sky. The bright blue stars are the most massive and luminous stars in this cluster. Less massive and dimmer stars far outnumber these blue beacons. All the stars in the cluster formed at about the same time — about 25 million years ago — out of the same material. Astronomers rely on nearby star clusters to observe variations in brightness and temperature of stars, and to accurately establish distances to farther stars in our galaxy.

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Distant Measurements February 4, 2002;

How to Find a Planet February 18, 2003

Pleiades Rising November 14, 2003

Andromeda Galaxy October 28, 2003

