

November skies bring ancient myths to life

By Dr. Wayne Wooten, PJC

For November, the Moon will be full, the Hunter's Moon, on Nov. 2, so the first two weeks of the month will thus find the Moon waning and not visible in the evening sky. The last quarter moon passes three degrees south of Mars on Nov. 9; the waning crescent moon passes seven degrees south of Saturn on Nov. 12, and a thin waning crescent lies six degrees south of Venus on the morning of the Nov. 15, with the new moon on the 16th. The last two weeks of November finds the moon waxing in the evening sky, with the waxing crescent passing 3 degrees north of Jupiter on Nov. 23, then reaching first quarter phase and appearing almost overhead at sunset on Nov. 24.

Giant Jupiter dominates the SW sky in Capricornus at the beginning of Nov., but will be lost in the Sun's glare by 2010. Any small scope will reveal what Galileo marveled at four hundred years ago; four large moons, all bigger or similar to ours in size, orbiting it in a line along Jupiter's equator.

West of Jupiter is the teapot shape of Sagittarius, which marks the heart of our Milky Way Galaxy, but the best view of our Galaxy lies overhead now. The brightest star of the northern hemisphere, Vega dominates the sky in the northwest. To the northeast of Vega is Deneb, the brightest star of Cygnus the Swan. To the south is Altair, the brightest star of Aquila the Eagle, the third member of the three bright stars that make the Summer Triangle so obvious in the NE these clear autumn evenings.

Overhead the square of

Pegasus is a beacon of fall. South of it lies the only bright star of Fall, Fomalhaut. If the southern skies of Fall look sparse, it is because we are looking away from our Galaxy into the depths of intergalactic space. It is just north of Fomalhaut that you will find the closest and largest of the planetary nebulae, NGC 7293 or "the Helix", about 650 light years distant. It appears as a faint ring, half as big as the full moon, and visible with binoculars from a dark, clear observing site.

The constellation Cassiopeia makes a striking W, rising in the NE as the Big Dipper sets in the NW. Polaris lies about midway between them. She contains many nice star clusters for binocular users in her outer arm of our Milky Way, extending to the NE now. Her daughter, Andromeda, starts with the NE corner star of Pegasus' Square, and goes NE with two more bright stars in a row.

To the northeast, Andromeda's hero, Perseus, rises. Between him and Cassiopeia is the fine Double Cluster, faintly visible with the naked eye and two fine binocular objects in the same field. Perseus contains the famed eclipsing binary star Algol, where the Arabs imagined the eye of the gorgon Medusa would lie. It fades to a third its normal brightness for six out of every 70 hours, as a larger but cooler orange giant covers about 80% of the smaller but hotter and thus brighter companion as seen from Earth. Check it out on a clear November evening, and see it the gorgon is winking at you. If so,

then instead of being as bright as Polaris, Algol fade to be only as bright as kappa Persei, the star just to its south. Look at Perseus' feet for the famed Pleiades cluster to rise, a sure sign of bright winter stars to come. In fact, yellow Capella, a giant star the same temperature and color as our much smaller Sun, rises at 7 p.m. as November begins. Next month, more on Orion and company.

For more information on the Escambia Amateur Astronomers, visit their website at www.eaaa.net or call sponsor Dr. Wayne Wooten at PJC at (850) 484-1152, or e-mail him at wwooten@pjc.edu.



EAAA HOSTED FREE PUBLIC STARGAZING IN NOVEMBER

As of press deadline, there were no scheduled public viewings for the month of November. For an up-to-date schedule, visit www.eaaa.net/events.



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