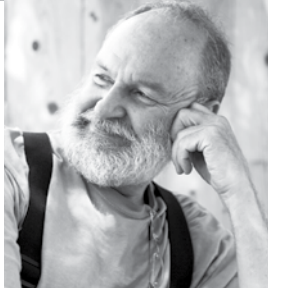


THE STARRY SIDE

Orion's fight

BY GREELEY WELLS



Greeley Wells

With fire season over and cool weather gracing our days and nights, we're heading toward the winter solstice on December 21, the longest night and shortest day of the year and the official beginning of winter.

In December, low in the west of our night sky, look for Altair, the brightest star in Aquila the eagle. There's a star on each side of Altair, making a nice threesome. Just above Altair is Delphinus the dolphin, sideways to us and jumping out of the sea in a curve that's well expressed by five medium-bright stars.

The great square of Pegasus, the winged horse, is way up in the sky, close to center and slowly heading down to the west. Also in December, my favorite constellation of all, Orion, has risen from the southeast. He was lying down but now is literally rising. Look for his three-in-a-row belt, scabbard, one arm raised holding his sword ready to strike Taurus the bull, a triangle just to the upper right. Orion's other arm is raising a shield. Exciting and obvious, with a head and shoulders and two legs—he's an amazing



Image: Sky & Telescope (skyandtelescope.org).

sight. To add to the excitement, his three-in-a-row belt points left to the brightest star in the whole night sky: Sirius, his dog, who rises behind Orion, following him to help in the fight! Whew!

Back down here on earth, I am now, since September 12, 2023, 80 years old! What?

Turning 80 has been a real wake-up call for me and has me asking an important question: what do I do at this stage in my life? The conclusion I've come to is to

give back what life has taught me, what I've learned that seems useful and meaningful to me and might be so for a few other people too. So I'm inviting you to a sneak preview of my website at peoplesolutions/applegater.

Enjoy!
Greeley Wells
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**— Of Note —
Planets**

Mercury is seen in the dusk of December and then disappears into the earth's sunset. It's the closest planet to the sun. In January and February it's visible just before sunrise.

Venus is an early-morning eastern star in December. In January and February, it's beautifully visible in the morning sky, getting higher and brighter as it continues westward ahead of the sun. You can see it even when all the other stars are gone from the sky.

Mars also shows up in dawn in both January and February. You'll notice its redness.

Jupiter shows up in the evenings in December, January, and February. Except for Venus, it's the brightest planet out there.

Saturn, a modest planet, shines in the evenings in December and January, and, low in the sky, at dusk in February.

Meteors

Taurids have a vague showing in early December, approximately 10 an hour. They originate near the Pleiades, a wonderful little clump of stars in Taurus.

Geminids are the shower of all showers to watch! They occur all night on December 13-14, but are best seen in early morning when they are higher. An astonishing rate of 120 per hour is possible! They come out of the Gemini Twins, especially Caster, the higher of the two.

Quadrantids is the final display this season, another of the best. We could see 100 an hour! January 3-4 is the peak, but there'll surely be some through mid-January.

Note that even though meteors seem to emanate from a specific spot, known as the radiating point, they can be seen all over the sky.

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