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THE CHRISTMAS SKIES

By Dr. Donald J. Greeley

It is possible for you to see over 2 million light years into the sky with your naked eye? If you know where to look you can see the great galaxy in Andromeda, find the great square of Pegases high in the South West. Its upper left corner star has two other stars running from it to the East. These stars belong to Andromeda. Look up above the middle bright one past two dimmer stars to that mysterious elongated glow of hazy light. That patch is composed of billions of wheeling stars. The light you gaze at tonight left those stars over 2 milion years ago.

Above Andromeda looking North is a rough "W" of stars; Cassiopeia, "The Queen", to the East lies Andromeda's rescuer Perseus, consisting of two sweeping branches of stars connecting at his helmet. In his Western hand he holds the severed head of Medusa or Algol, "The Demon Star" which varies in brightness every 2.8 days.

Between the helmet of Perseus and Cassiopeia lies a fuzzy glow, the famous Double Cluster. In a telescope they resemble two heaps of diamonds on black velvet.

The longer branch of Perseus leads South to the prettiest cluster in the heavens, The Pleiades or Seven Sisters. Many people confuse this group with the Little Dipper because of its own tiny bowl and handle shape. It is located in the shoulder of Taurus, "The Bull". The Bull whose V-shaped head is farther East containing the bright orange star Aldebaron, "The Eye of the Bull".

Following the more Northern arm of the V East leads to a distinct

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Pentagon, Auriga containing Capella, a brilliant yellow star.

Northeast lies Gemini, "The Twins"; Pollox and Castor, while East looms the gigantic Orion, "The Mighty Hunter". His belt of 3 aligned stars set between the red super giant star, Betelgeuse on his right shoulder and the blue-white super giant Rigel on his left knee. Two other bright stars complete the other knee and shoulder.

Best of all, Sirius the brightest star in the sky lies East of Orion's belt. Now is the perfect time to watch it twinkling at its most vigorous, not only quavering, but having its blue-white glitter broken into piercing rays of rainbow colors.