

# The Moon Glides Past Mars and the Pleiades

- a February 2021 Sky Event from the [Astronomy Club of Asheville](#)

The waxing Moon moves, from west to east along the ecliptic, past the planet Mars and then the Pleiades open star cluster, on the nights of **February 18-20**. To observe this conjunction, look in the direction of the zodiac constellation Taurus – the Bull. The Moon reaches its first-quarter phase on February 19<sup>th</sup>, when its mountains and crater rims will cast long visible shadows, easily seen through a small telescope at low to medium power.

Compare the glow of the orange-giant star **Aldebaran** (the eye of the Bull) to the copper tint of the planet **Mars**. Both objects will shine like twins at about the same visual magnitude on these nights. Aldebaran is some 66 light years beyond Mars!

At a mere 444 light years away, the **Pleiades** open (galactic) star cluster is one of the closest star groupings of its kind to our solar system. These very young, hot stars are easily seen with your unaided eyes, and they are often confused and mis-identified as the “Little Dipper” asterism. How many of the Pleiades stars can you see with your unaided eyes? Under clear dark skies, most folks will see five, although some claim to see seven – hence the cluster’s other name the “Seven Sisters”. With binoculars or a small telescope, many more stars (all members of the cluster) shine wonderfully into view.

Mythology reveals that the seven sisters are all children of the Titan Atlas and the ocean nymph Pleione – from whom the star group takes its name. The sisters are Maia, Electra, Taygete, Celaeno, Alcyone, Sterope, and Merope.

The star cluster is also classified as Messier object #45 (M45) and Melotte #22.

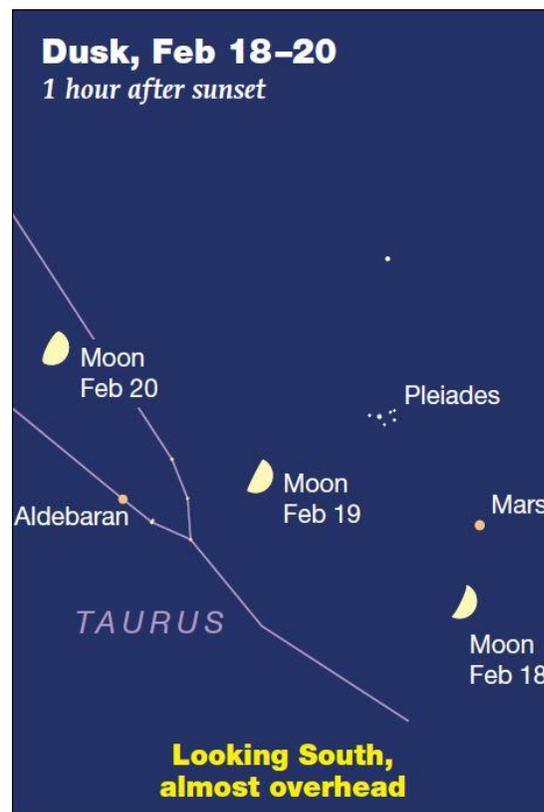


Chart courtesy of [Sky & Telescope](#)



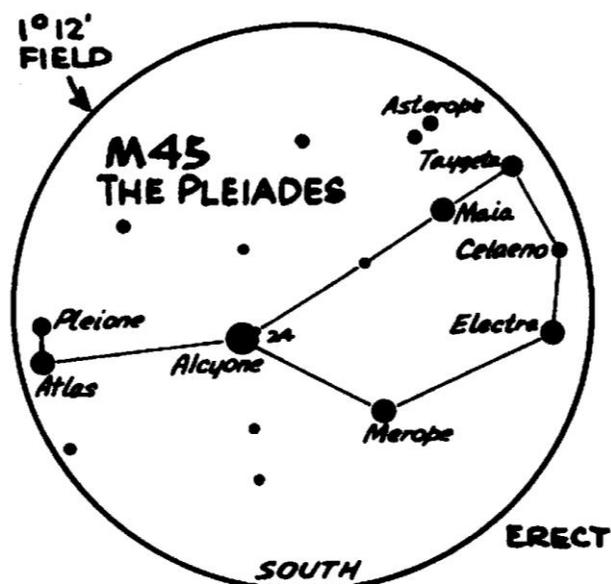
## The Pleiades Star Cluster or "Seven Sisters"

444 light years away

30 light years across

Less than 100 million years old

Its brightest star "Alcyone"  
is 1,000 times more  
luminous than the Sun.



**The PLEIADES - WELL-KNOWN OPEN CLUSTER MAKES A PRETTY PICTURE at 50x**

THE PLEIADES (PLEE-uh-deez)		
SEVEN SISTERS	ALCYONE...al-SIGH-oh-nee	3.0
	ASTEROPE...as-TAIR-oh-pee	5.9
	CELAENO...seh-LEE-noe	5.4
	ELECTRA...eh-LEK-tra	3.8
	MAIA.....MY-uh	4.0
	MEROPE...MARE-oh-pee	4.3
	TAYGETA...tah-N-ah-tah	4.4
	PLEIONE..plee-OH-nee	5.1
	ATLAS.....AT-Lus	3.8
PLEIONE IS MAMA AND ATLAS IS PAPA. STAR #24 (MAG 8) MAKES A WIDE DOUBLE WITH ALCYONE AT 117 SECONDS		