

Close Encounter of Mars with the Star Mebsuta

- an April 2023 Sky Event - Courtesy of [Sky & Telescope](#)

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Shining at magnitude 1.2, Mars is well past its December prime. But its apparition continues with some interesting conjunctions, including this evening's (April 14th) near miss with 3.0-magnitude Epsilon (ϵ) Geminorum, the star otherwise known as **Mebsuta**.

Tonight's close call, in the constellation Gemini, occurs because Epsilon lies just 2° north of the ecliptic (the path that the Sun, Moon, and planets follow across our sky). If the pairing of these two objects has a familiar ring, it's because they've met before.

Mars actually eclipsed (passed directly in front of) Epsilon on April 7, 1976 — a much-anticipated and very rare event that attracted the interest of amateur astronomers and research groups around the world. And this evening the planet and star are as close as they've been since that fateful meeting 47 Aprils ago.

This time, Mars will approach within 9' (arc-minutes) of the star at 2:09 p.m. EDT. By the time twilight starts to fade in North America, the planet's eastward motion will have carried it a little farther from the star — something more like 13'. You should have no problem seeing both objects without optical aid, but binoculars will greatly enhance the view. Mars is quite close to the star on the preceding and following evenings, but this really is the best night. And you don't want to miss out — Mars won't be this close to Epsilon again until the year 2055. ***

Additional highlight from the Astronomy Club of Asheville

The star Mebsuta, Epsilon (ϵ) Geminorum, is located some 900 light years behind the planet Mars. It's a relatively young star at only 50 million years of age. And it's a light orange (G8 classification) supergiant, that is some 7,600 times more luminous than our Sun.

When observing this conjunction of Mebsuta and Mars with binoculars (or with a telescope at low power), you may notice a much fainter 9th magnitude star (SAO 78683) located just 2 arc minutes from Mebsuta. Astronomers think that this apparent "companion" is probably just passing through Mebsuta's neighborhood, enjoying the show put on by its brilliant, but temporary, acquaintance.

