The Balloon Man in Perseus

Sam Storch

I remember the first time I stumbled on the spectacular Double Cluster in Perseus, which appears on star atlases as NGC 869 and NGC 884. I was observing back in the early 1970's using the "poking around" method with my trusty RV-6 and an Edmund 28-mm war surplus Erfle eyepiece with no field stop. Suddenly, I stopped and uttered an unprintable utterance, followed by "it's full of stars!" as if I was the terrified astronaut in Kubrick's epic film *2001- A Space Odyssey*.

I had discovered, quite personally, the Double Cluster, an object still on my top three list of deep-sky objects. I enjoy this pair of clusters with the ruddy garnet between the sprays of stars so much that if I can, I look at this object every night it is up, several times, show it to all who heed my call to the eyepiece, and then as the last object of the night, capping my scope and hoping to "keep" some of its light for next time.

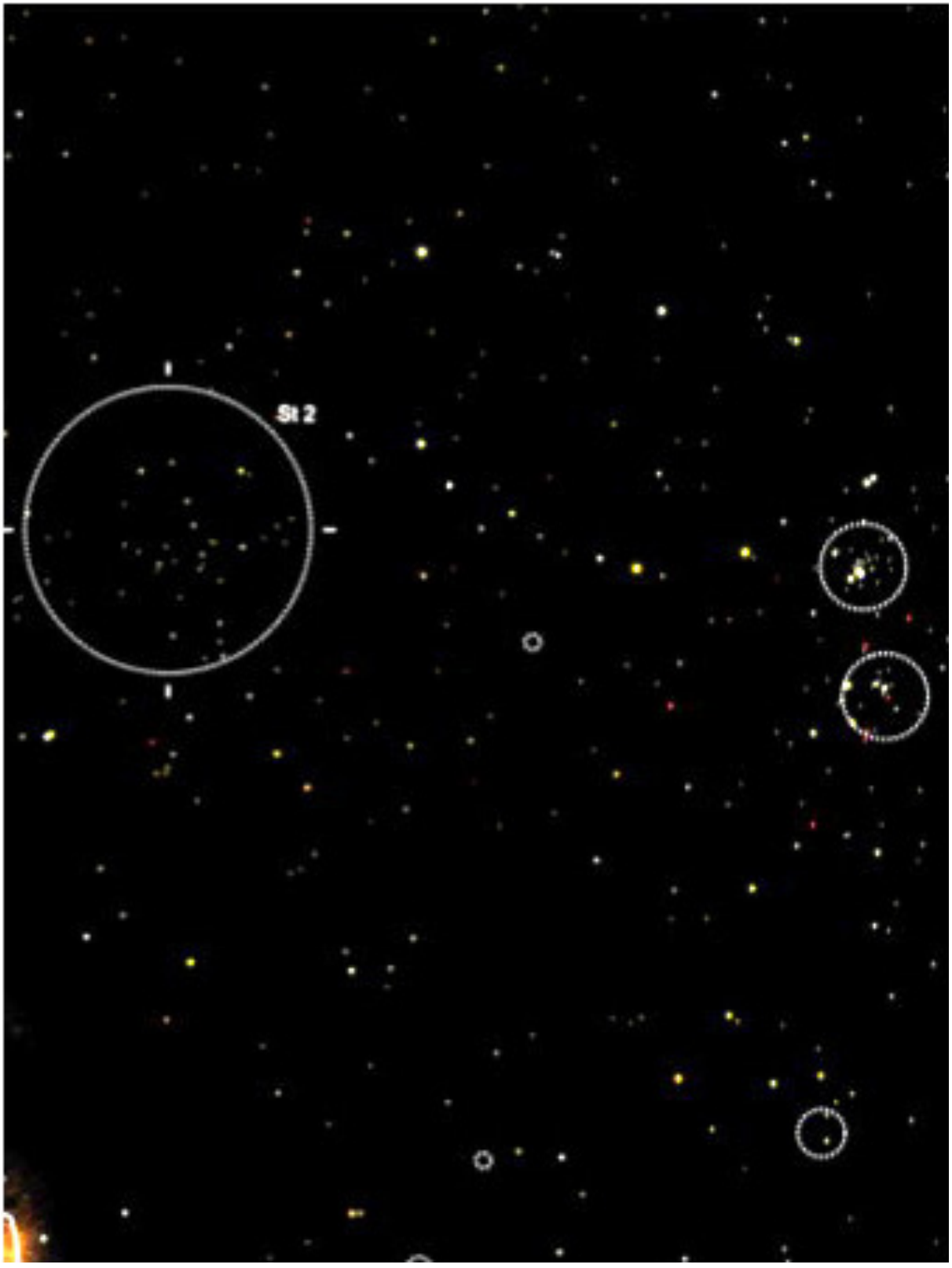
Find the Double Cluster by looking midway from Cassiopeia to Marfak, the brightest star in Perseus, the Champion. In really dark skies, the fuzzy patch reveals your target, otherwise, even the slightest optical aid reveals the reward. See the illustrations, later on, if you don't already know this trophy object.

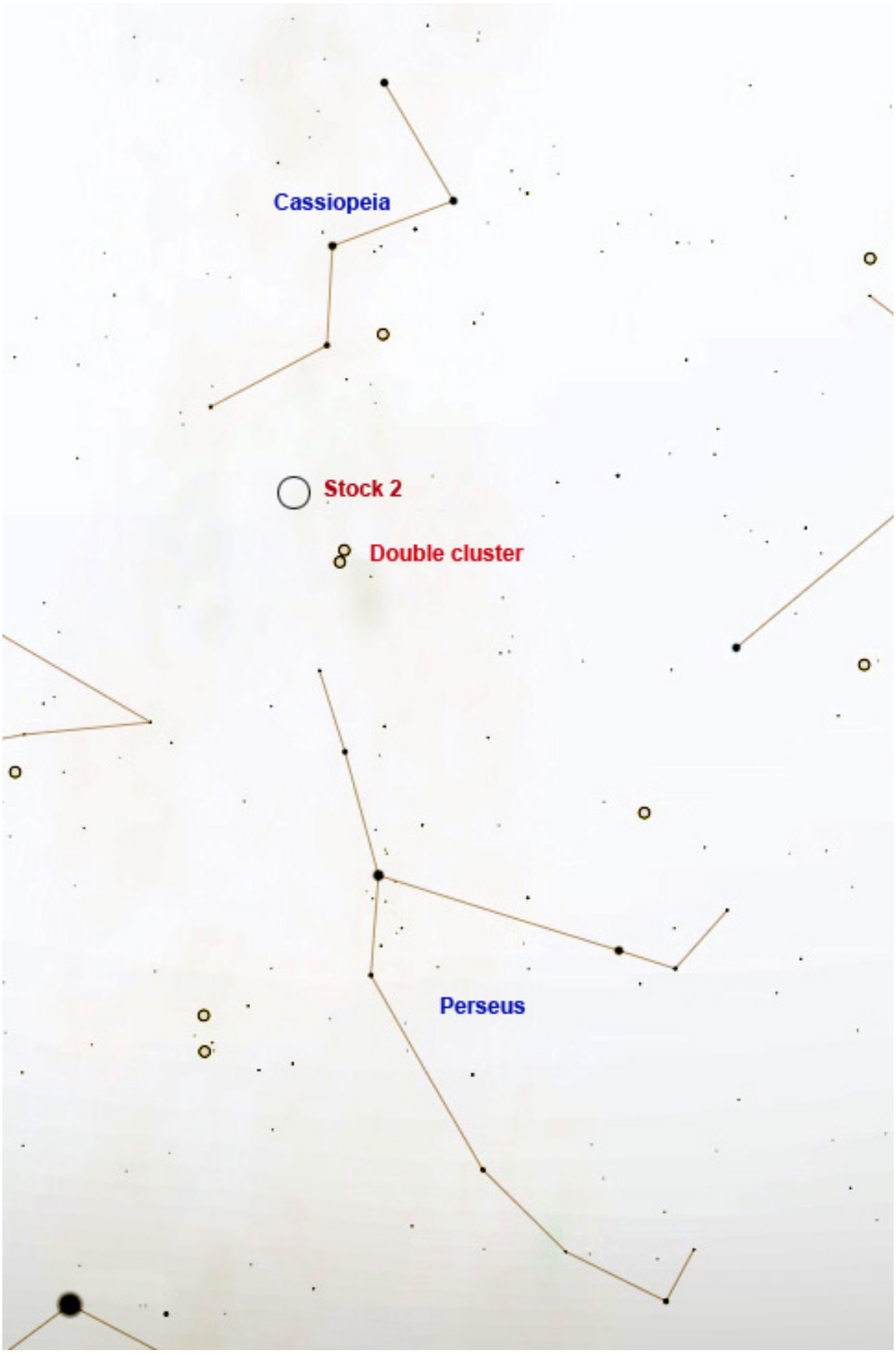
Sometimes I look around to see what surrounds my target, and if you enjoy that kind of thing, you'll find a gently curved line of equally faint stars running up from the Double Cluster, it's a cute sight in my 10x50 binoculars, and a thrill in a 6-inch or larger diameter telescope. At the end of the curving "string" of stars is a faint cluster, known to veteran deep-sky observers as Stock 2.

The whole scene reminds me of a man on the street holding a slightly stale helium-filled balloon. Surely you know that balloon, the "day old" kind, still barely buoyant. Enjoy the Double Cluster balloon man as he gently guides his Stock 2 balloon into your view.

And, save some of the starlight for next time!

Double Cluster


St 2


Cassiopeia
Stock 2
Double cluster
Perseus