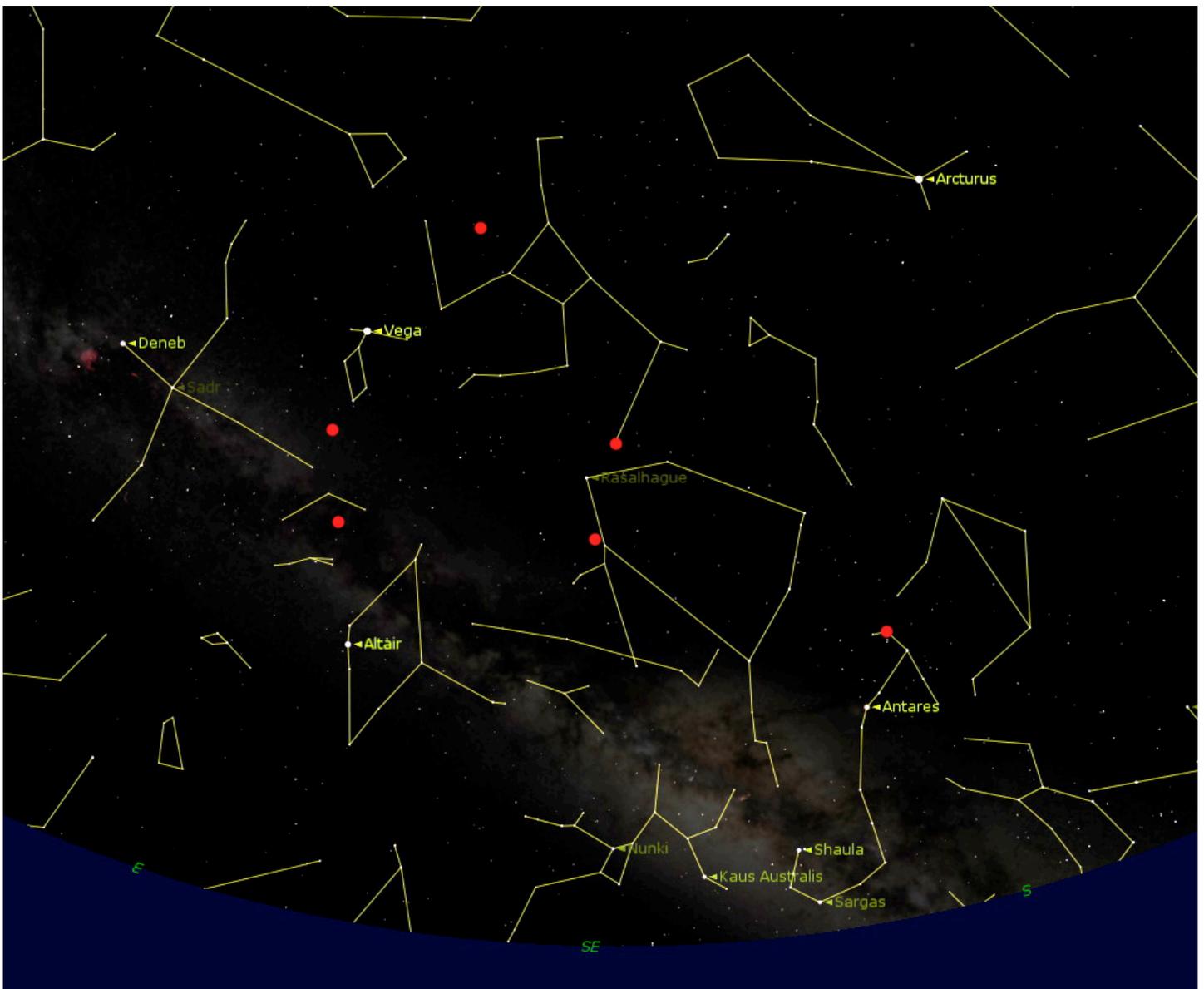


## The Busy Downtown Scene

By Sam Storch

If winter skies are pristine and filled with bright, splashy treats, then spring skies are, by comparison, calm, though rich with double stars and galaxies. How do we describe the summer skies? I liken seeing the summer sky to watching the hubbub of a downtown street scene- it's busy and crowded with interesting sights to discover. Perhaps you'll never see them all, but it is well worth trying anyway!

Teeming with star clusters, both open and globular, and traversed by the inspiring sweep of the Milky Way, the summer skies are also filled with some surprises. Of course, that glowing band of milky starlight is drowned out by waste lighting. There's hope, however! Some of the surprises I've chosen for you are relatively well known, while other are in plain sight yet often forgotten. Either way, you can be sure that all of these targets will "deliver!"



You're looking to the "rising" part of the sky, late on a June evening. This image, made in *Starry Night Pro*, is intended as a "starter" for you to use in planning an evening bouncing around the early summer sky. The red dots are an approximation of where the targets are located.

A. Have you observed M-92 lately? It's a nice globular, but is often overlooked by those staring at nearby M-13 in Hercules. How are the two different?

B. Where's M-56? Everyone pokes around Lyra to find the famous Ring Nebula, but what is M-56 like?

C. The constellation of Ophiuchus, the Serpent Bearer, is not only the 13th constellation that the Sun passes through in its annual trip along the ecliptic, but is also famous for an abundance of globular clusters. But- have you noticed the huge, bright open cluster in Ophiuchus? That's right- it's an open cluster, not a globular! Because it shines at magnitude 4.19, you should be able to find IC-4665 easily enough. Poke around to the northeast ("upper left") of Cebalrai and this cluster will surely dazzle you!

D. Find the star Rasalhague. Now, use it to find Ras Algethi, and when you observe it in your telescope, you will see a spectacular colored double star!

E. While admiring Antares, did you stop nearby to enjoy gorgeous Graffias? That star's name itself somehow suggests the claws or dangerous pincers of an animal! What is so special about Graffias in your telescope?

F. Mentally, draw a line connecting Vega and Altair. Then, run a line in your mind's eye from Deneb down the spine of Cygnus, until that line just about bisects the Vega- Altair line. Look there for the Coathanger Cluster, also known as Collinder 399. While not a true star cluster, the fortunate alignment of the stars still reminds me of the old, curved wooden coathanger which is always hanging, forlorn, at the far end of the bar in my closet. To find this cluster, you will need binoculars, or a telescope set up for very low power and wide field of view.

These celestial treats are presented in no particular order, are all easy targets, and are not necessarily on the "top ten" list of famous summer showpieces. Some of these will take a little more detective work just to figure out what object to seek or where, but that's a labor of love for the fun of it! It may be summer vacation, but the six prizes above make a good night's assignment. We astronomers are called amateurs, a term derived from a Latin word for "lover." Go out, then. Observe, labor, and love the stars!