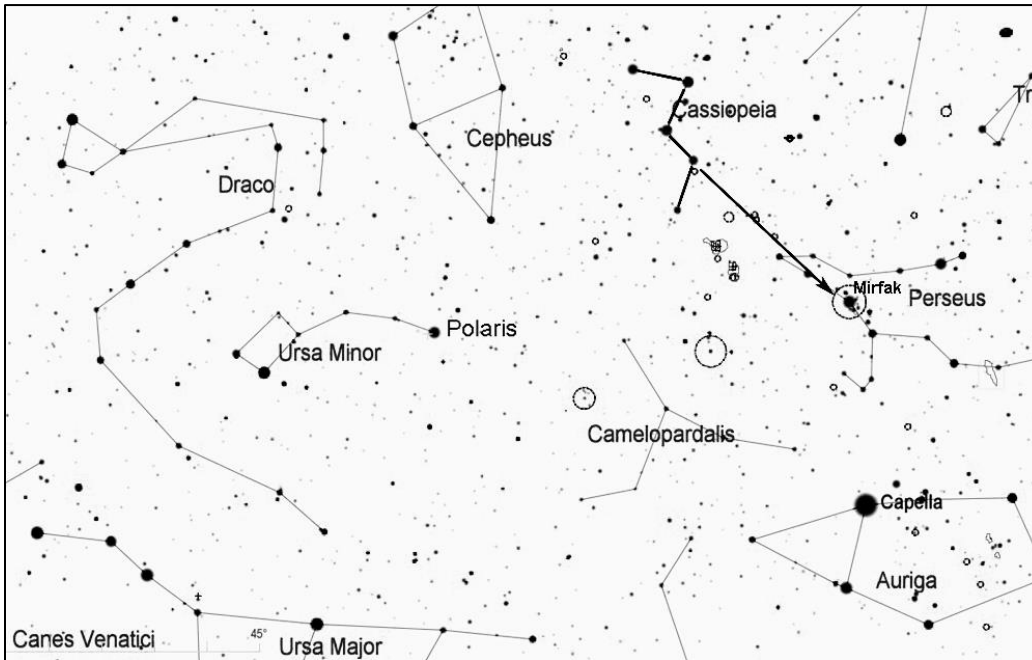


Melotte 20, the Alpha Persei Association

The bright star Mirfak is also known as Alpha Persei. The group of young, hot stars that surround it is called the Alpha Persei Association. This is one of the few star clusters that can be seen with the naked eye, and it is a wonderful sight through binoculars. The cluster extends about 3 degrees from end to end, making it too large to fit in the field of view of most telescopes. This group of stars is about 600 light years away.



Find the constellation Cassiopeia, which has a distinctive "W" shape (although its orientation changes at different times of year as it circles the north celestial pole). On fall evenings, look for Cassiopeia in the northeast, where its tilt makes it look like a "3", and in the winter look high in the north above Polaris, where it is oriented like an "M".

As shown here, use the stars of Cassiopeia to direct you to the nearby constellation Perseus, and its brightest star, Mirfak.

The stars of Perseus are fairly bright. The shape I see is some sort of animal with a curved tail. Whatever shape you see, note that Mirfak is surrounded by a loose group of stars, which is the Alpha Persei Association. Some of these stars can be seen with the naked eye, but many more can be seen with binoculars, making an impressive sight.

