

## Stargazing

### lion's roar



Just as spring weather is heralded by a lion's roar, so are spring skies tied to the regal feline. Rising Leo dominates the spring sky, and he is a constellation worthy of much admiration. The great sickle in Leo, a backwards question mark, composes his mighty maned-head and his chest. This star shape is anchored by the star Regulus, a bright star representing Leo's heart. Westward facing Leo has his tail curled with the star Denebola, a Latin name meaning "tail."

In mid April Leo is high in the southern sky at 10 p.m. To his west and to his east he will be bracketed by bright giant gas planets: Jupiter to the east, in the spring constellation Virgo, and Saturn to the west in the winter constellation Gemini. For many months these enormous planets have been slowly moving along the ecliptic—the line that connects the sun, moon, and planets. The ecliptic's path bisects the twelve constellations of the Zodiac. Early astronomers recognized the significance of planets passing before these constellations as a way to predict a person's characteristics and future. Today astrologers give a horoscope, but the roots of astronomy and astrology are the same.

The constellations flanking great Leo are dim and difficult to find. Cancer is immediately to his west. An inverted "Y," Cancer is hard to find,

but worth searching with binoculars or a telescope for its hazy Beehive nebula. A nebula is a fuzzy looking spot in the sky where a star has long ago dissipated; what you are seeing is the gases left over from that explosion. Slowly, they will be recycled into new stars, and so these areas are considered star "nurseries."

Eastward from Leo is Virgo, a string of stars stretching along the ecliptic. The challenge is to imagine that this is the reclining figure of the Goddess of Fertility. Only one bright star, Spica, shines along her length. For now, however, Spica is joined by bright temporary visitor Jupiter.

A spring evening filled with the cacophony of frog and toad songs is made complete with a "walk" through the heavens above. The accompanying map should help guide you on your way; it is set for mid April

at 10 p.m. 🗺️

—Lisa Daly