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Location: [Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1997](#) -> [Dec](#) -> **Re: Rare Planetary Alignment And Other Celestial**

## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Re: Rare Planetary Alignment And Other Celestial

From: [Stig\\_Agermose@online.pol.dk](mailto:Stig_Agermose@online.pol.dk) (Stig Agermose)  
Date: Fri, 5 Dec 1997 11:25:49 +0200  
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Tuesday, Dec. 2, 1997 =B7 Page A 1 =A91997 San Francisco Examiner

Jupiter aligns with Mars - and moon, Venus and Mercury

Stargazers have treats in store throughout month

Keay Davidson  
EXAMINER SCIENCE WRITER

A celestial parade of planets is enlivening the evening sky.

On Tuesday evening, the crescent moon and four planets cluster in the southwestern heavens, just after sunset.

The unusual grouping of worlds - the moon, Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Mercury - is an illusion. In reality, they are many millions of miles apart. However, they lie in approximately the same direction, which creates the illusion of alignment.

"Watching from the Marina would be good," says Bob Havlen, a professional astronomer who is also executive director of the 6,000-member Astronomical Society of the Pacific in San Francisco.

Tuesday evening's display is an impressive start to a month of astronomical wonders. Parents who plan to buy their youngsters a small telescope or a strong pair of binoculars for the holidays couldn't have picked a better time.

Also ahead this month:

\*On the night of Dec. 8-9, the moon passes over or "occults" Saturn, the ringed planet. Through telescopes, Saturn will appear to wink out as the dark limb of the moon moves over it. Later Saturn will emerge from behind the illuminated side of the moon.

Saturn will be "a wondrous target for telescopes, with its rings tilted 9 degrees," says the current issue of Sky & Telescope magazine.

And the moon, of course, is a marvel for telescopic viewing - like a

dead Earth, complete with mountain ranges and dried seas of lava, billions of years old.

\*On Dec. 11, the planet Venus will be brilliant - 16 times as bright as Sirius. Sirius is the brightest star visible at night from the Northern Hemisphere. That evening, newspapers and police departments should expect to receive excited calls from the public, who will inquire about the UFO toward the southwest.

\*On the night of Dec. 12-13, the full moon will occult the bright red star Aldebaran.

\*On Dec. 21 and 22, Venus and Mars, the Red Planet, will pass close to each other - just 1.1 degrees apart. By comparison, the full moon is a half-degree wide.

On Tuesday night, the moon's slender crescent will lie very low in the southwest just after sunset. To the left will be an orange-red "star," actually the planet Mars.

On Wednesday evening, the moon will hang just above Venus. Venus is brilliant mainly because it is perpetually shrouded in clouds of sulfuric acid. Also, Venus is the second-closest planet to the sun. The surface temperature of Venus is about 800 degrees Fahrenheit.

By Thursday night, the moon will have fattened from a skinny crescent to a fairly plump one. To its left in the evening sky will be Jupiter, a "gas giant" swept by hurricanes bigger than Earth.

All week, keen-eyed stargazers may see the tiny world Mercury - the closest planet to the sun - barely above the southwestern horizon. It's extremely hard to see, though, and may be hopelessly shrouded by low-level fog.

If you can't see it, don't feel bad. One of history's most famous astronomers, Nicolaus Copernicus - who showed in the 16th century that Earth orbits the sun, not vice versa - lived his entire life in Poland without once glimpsing little Mercury.

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