It'll be an eventful week

By Vernon Whetstone
Amateur Astronomer

Okay troops, I have a fun-filled week of observing for you this week.
Something to look for almost each night.
First up is something you can't look for, a total solar eclipse, unless you are out in the South Pacific, or northern Australia.
The new moon will totally cover the face of the Sun causing it to be blotted out, eclipsed.
I have some astronomer friends in Australia, and they have been—if you will pardon the expression—over the moon about it for several months now.
A solar eclipse is an event that is well worth the effort getting to where you can watch it.
Unfortunately for us, it is often in some remote part of the world where you either have to be on a ship or out in the wilderness to watch it.
However, fear not. Our day is coming. We here in the southwest corner of Nebraska and the northwest corner of Kansas will have our turn.
Just before 11:30am MDT on Aug. 21, 2017, there will be a total solar eclipse that will cross Nebraska from the northwest corner, across the entire state to the southeast corner.
The best place to observe totality will be near Grand Island.
Here in our area the Sun will be about 98 percent covered. Be sure to mark your calendars.
As for me, well, I will be in Grand Island.
Tomorrow night, Nov. 15, and for almost every night for the next week, be outside about an hour after local sunset looking southwest for the tiny, reddish dot that is the planet Mars.
If you have a pair of binoculars, put Mars in the center of your field of view. From there you will be able to see three very nice objects all directly above the planet. The nearest is M8, the Lagoon Nebula, followed as your view goes up, by M20, the Trifid Nebula, and the nice little open star cluster, M21.
Way down and to the lower right will be a slender two-day old crescent moon. Use your binoculars to look for earthshine on the face of the moon.
Don't worry if your first attempt is clouded out. These objects will be together and viewable until Nov. 22, although Mars will be moving off to the left a bit each day.
On the evening of Nov. 16, The tiny planet Pluto will be just above and to the right of the crescent moon. Although you won't be able to see Pluto, you will at least know where it is.
Something you can see, however, are two more nice star clusters. If you put the moon in the center, the open cluster M25 is to the upper right. If you put M25 on the extreme upper right of the field of view at about the two o'clock position, visible just beyond the field of view at the eight o'clock position is the star cluster M22, the Sagittarius Cluster, so just swing your view a little down and to the left.
On the morning of Nov. 18, about an hour before local sunrise, look east just above the

southeast horizon for bright Venus, with the slightly dimmer star Spica to the lower right. Down and a little left is sister planet Saturn making a return to our morning skies.

SKY WATCH: First quarter moon, Tuesday, Nov. 20. On Thursday, Nov. 15, start your morning, hour before local sunrise, Venus/Saturn watch. Watch as the pair move closer together each day toward their spectacular, Nov. 26, conjunction.

It might help if you draw a quick picture of what you are seeing in your binoculars or telescope. Doesn’t have to be fancy, we are not looking for any Rembrandt here, just a sketch of what you are seeing so you can compare each day’s viewing.

One more thing, if you want to get up for it. Saturday night, Nov. 17, into the morning of Sunday, Nov. 18, the Leonid meteor shower will peak. Look for Leo, the Lion above the eastern horizon after midnight. At the peak of the shower there could be between 15 to 20 meteors per hour.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.