

Will you live to see a “Supernova”?

Unless you are very young, you will no doubt remember the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre nine years ago. Despite being inundated with bad news nowadays, somehow this event remains permanently embedded in our mindset compared to any other catastrophe. Why is this case? I'm not a psychologist but my guess would be that occurrences of incredible impression not only become anchored for life but are unforgettable.

So on that note, is there a celestial comparison? The Crab Nebula (M1) is the result of a supernova (when a star, like our sun, runs out of fuel) that detonated in 1054 AD, according to historic Chinese and Arab astronomers. Exploding around early May of that year, it reached peak intensity of about -7 magnitude, which is not only the brightness object in the night sky (outside of the moon) but was luminous enough to see in plain daylight for two months.

Are we close to



Neel Roberts
The Sky's the Limit

experiencing one? Betelgeuse, 640 light years from Earth, is close to going supernova and with an estimated magnitude of -12 upon ignition; it would expel gases as large as our solar system for months. Without a doubt, this would now be the brightest object ever seen, night or day, with the close exception of our sun (-26); the sites legends are made of!

Sky watch for the next month

On Sept. 7, the moon will be at its closest (perigee) point to the Earth, so watch for large tides. On Sept. 21 at 2 a.m. it will be at its furthest point (apogee).

Venus will be at its brightest point on Sept. 23 before it sets in the southwest-west horizon.

The fall equinox officially

arrives Sept. 22, at 9:09 p.m. and at the same time a full moon will be out in the southeast-east.

The zodiacal light is a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. Discovered by the astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini in 1683 and later explained by Nicolas Fatio de Duillier in 1684, it's hard to find. But the best time is from Sept. 5 for two weeks in the northeast before dawn.

Public events for the next month

The Alberta Star Party, hosted by the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada - Calgary (RASC), takes place in the Starland Recreation Area Campground near Drumheller (www.starlandcounty.com) on Sept. 10-12. The camping fee is \$15 per night and everyone is welcome. For more information, contact Roland Dechesne, RASC president, at 403-510-4330, or email him at Roland.Dechesne@cnrl.com. For

more information, go to astronomycalgary.com/events/info/155.

Terror from the Skies speaker Jeroen Stil will be at the Rothney Observatory Open House. The universe is a dangerous place, and Dr. Stil will uncover the celestial objects that go bump in the night. Find out just how safe our little blue planet really is and how far away the dangers lay. View celestial objects through our telescopes, including the 1.8 metre ARCT, one of the largest telescopes in Canada. The cost is \$20 per car at the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory located near Priddis, about 30 kilometres southwest of Calgary, on Sept. 18 from 8-11 p.m. For more information, contact Jennifer Howse at 403-931-2366, or visit astronomycalgary.com/events/info/60.

Happy fall and shorter days!

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