

Vulcan—the First Planet from the Sun?

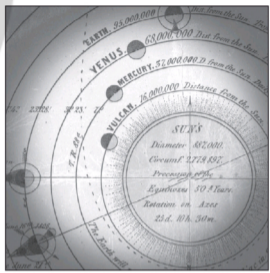
Is Spock a real person? Could be debatable as the late Dr. Benjamin M Spock would say yes. How about the planet Vulcan? While there certainly are several towns and even a county which take the name of the Roman god of war, there was a narrative for sometime of a planet 16,000,000 miles from our Sun with the name Vulcan [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan_\(hypothetical_planet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan_(hypothetical_planet)). Labelled as hypothetical, it is most interesting for several reasons. For those who've watched the 1960s Star Trek series, the idea of Vulcan being a planet entered popular culture but mystics like Helena Petrovna Blavatsky spoke about it a century before in The Secret Doctrine on page 578 https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd-pdf/SecretDoctrineVol1_eBook.pdf.



size". German astronomer J. W. Pastorf reported many observations, on 23 October 1822, 24 and 25 July 1823, six times in 1834, on 18 October 1836, 1 November 1836 and on 16 February 1837, also claimed to have seen two spots: the larger was 3 arcseconds across, and the smaller 1.25 arcseconds. Theories that there could be planets orbiting inside Mercury's orbit were put forward by British scientist Thomas Dick in 1838 and by French physicist, mathematician, and astronomer Jacques Babinet in 1846 who suggested there may be "incandescent clouds of a planetary kind, circling the Sun" and proposed the name "Vulcan" (after the god Vulcan from Roman mythology) for a planet close to the Sun.

As a planet near the Sun would be lost in its glare, several observers mounted systematic searches to try to catch it during "transit" when it passes in front of the Sun's disc. German amateur astronomer Heinrich Schwabe searched unsuccessfully on every clear day from 1826 to 1843 and Yale scientist Edward Claudius Herrick conducted observations twice daily starting in 1847, hoping to catch a planet in transit. French physician and amateur astronomer Edmond Modeste Lescarbault began

searching the Sun's disk in 1853, and more systematically after 1858, with a 3.75" (95 mm) refractor in an observatory. Back in 2007, NASA mentions the planet https://www.nasa.gov/visions/universe/newworlds/Vulcan_Planet.html but theorized it orbits a dwarf star, called 40 Eridani A. This Halloween, look up in the sky and ask, could these earlier observers be onto something? Yesterday's fiction usually becomes tomorrow's fact, but time will tell. The best is yet to come!



Sky watch for the next month:
Download this month's sky free chart at <http://whatsouttonight.com/Resources/Resources/2022OctWOTSkyChart.pdf>

1 Jupiter/Moon rising at dusk-

- Saturday October 08th look East around 7:00 pm as these two rise very close for a spectacular view all night. https://in-the-sky.org/news.php?id=20221008_20_100
- 2 Zodiacal Light-** Did you catch this last month? It's a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. Best time is from Sunday, October 23rd for 2 weeks in the East before dawn.
- 3 Orionids Meteor Shower Peaks-** Friday, October 21st after sunset just to the north of constellation Orion's bright star Betelgeuse. With the second-fastest entry velocity of the annual showers at 10-20 per hour, meteors from the Orionids produce yellow and green colors and have been known to produce an odd fireball on a perfectly Moonless night. https://in-the-sky.org/news.php?id=20221021_10_100
- 4 Draconid Meteor Shower Peaks-** Sunday, October 09th best seen after twilight facing NNW high up. While not as dramatic as other showers it can occasionally spew hundreds an hour, but the full moon will interfere. https://in-the-sky.org/news.php?id=20221009_10_100
- Happy Fall and cooler days!**
Neel Roberts is a local astronomer in Southern Alberta and welcomes your comment at Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com. Tel: (403) 560-6574. Check out his work at www.ptccanada.com.