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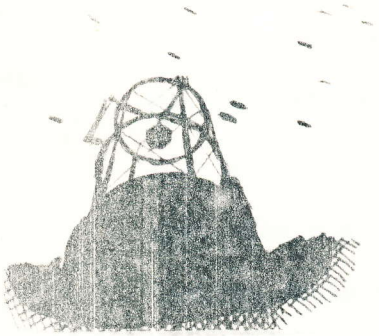

UNIVERSITY LOWBROW ASTRONOMERS

NEWSLETTER

A HEAVENLY SPECTACLE

by: Jim Cypser

We who live here in the Milky Way galaxy are long overdue for a supernova. As a lot of you might know, a supernova occurs when a massive star reaches the end of its normal lifespan and "dies" in one of the most enormous explosions known to humanity. The last obvious supernova in our galaxy was seen in 1604, and normally we might expect to see one to occur every three hundred years or so.

Why should amateur astronomers care about supernovae? Well, two of the last three recorded supernovae in our galaxy shown brighter than Venus and were seen in the daytime. The last one was about as bright as Jupiter. What all this means is that if you faithfully check out the sky every clear night, you may be the first to spot the next supernova. Supernovae often shine brightly for months before fading below naked-eye visibility. So if one does burst forth in our skies soon, someone would surely notice it eventually. It may appear in a constellation too far south for us Michiganders to see (such as Centaurus) or it may appear too close to the sun and thus go unnoticed until after it had started to grow dim again. It is more likely that a supernova will appear in the parts of the sky where the Milky Way shines more brightly. This is simply because there are more stars in those directions, the directions that are looking toward the "disk" of the galaxy. Of course, I know now that I have said that, the next supernova will appear in some obscure place like Camelopardus...

If you don't know where Camelopardus is, ask, because if one is really serious about looking out for supernovae--or ordinary novae, for that matter--one must be able to recognize all the constellations in the sky. You must know each star in its place, because what you will be looking foris a star out of place--a "new" star, as the Latin meaning of the word "nova" implies.

We may on the other hand, have to wait another hundred years for our next supernova. But if you step outside to briefly check the sky 'most every clear night, there might be other unexpected rewards--a surprise meteor shower, an aurora, or a satellite passing overhead. There might be Earthshine faintly rounding the cresent moon into a disk, or noctilucent clouds glowing blue or ruddy in Earth's upper atmosphere...

None of these things are as rare as the spectacle of a star suddenly coming to be where none was seen before, and outshining all the rest to boot--so watch carefully!

THE LOWBOW CORNER

by: Don Luttermoser

In case you haven't heard, in 1982 the planets are all going to align and when this happens the Earth is going to have major earthquakes and volcanos, as well as the sun, which will be in great upheval--or so some preachers would have us believe it. Well friends, and I do call you friends as Jesus would want me to, the planets aren't going to align; as a matter of fact they will all be on the same side of the sun in that year with a minimum separation of 96 degrees-that's over half the visible sky from horizon to horizon. Actually, the planets all being on the same side of the sun isn't all that rare of a phenomena, and has happened many times in the past-with no ill-effect on the sun or Earth.

How did all this stupidity get started you ask? Well in 1974, two British scientists (if you want to call them Scientist) wrote a book on the subject called "The Jupiter Effect". The authors predicted (with no evidence) that the rare planetary alignment in 1982 would cause major disruptions on the Earth.

The ignorance continued when a group of bible carrying hypocrites(sp?) seen this and assumed this would be the second coming of Christ. They also changed it from a rare planetary configuration, to a direct alignment. It's OK, they change the laws of physics, even though the planets are in different planes, and direct alignment impossible; anything to scare more people to hand over more money-but they're going to heaven.

It is things like this that should promp us--amateur astronomers, to push astronomy to the public. Enlighten them about which things are and correct and those which are fiction. If you would like to read more on the rebuttal of the 1982 planetary alignment theory, see Mercury magazine's July/August 1979 issue, page 72 "Planets, Sunspots, and Earthquakes".

Amen.