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UFO UpDates Mailing List**Sky & Telescope's Weekly News Bulletin December**

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Sky & Telescope's
 Weekly News
 Bulletin
 December 20, 1996

Meteorite Madness

You might have caught a news report last week about a meteorite=20 hitting Honduras and creating a 50-meter-wide crater, fires, and=20 other calamity. Well, here's the story as best we know at present. A very bright, fragmenting bolide was seen on the night of=20 November 22nd, exploding near the village of San Luis. It was seen=20 from as far away as central Guatemala, 200 kilometers away. However, the Associated Press report of a 50-meter-wide crater is=20 unconfirmed and probably false. Right now a team of astronomers is=20 at the site, combing the rugged terrain for meteorites.

We've also heard that a major fireball was seen in the Pacific=20 Northwest and Vancouver before dawn on December 17th.=20

Meanwhile, two recent auctions offer a sense of what meteorites=20 from Mars are worth. On December 10th a 7.6-gram slice of the=20 Zagami meteorite, which fell on Nigeria in 1962, fetched \$11,000 -- close to \$1,500 per gram. But the November 20th auction=20 of a trio of Martian stones, representing three of the known=20 compositional types and totaling 498.5 grams, yielded a "no sale." The top bid of \$1.1 million fell short of the owner's minimum=20 asking price.=20

Gamma-Ray Repeater

Several spacecraft have detected a sequence of gamma-ray bursts=20 over two days in late October from the same location in the southern=20 constellation Horologium. Such bursts have never been seen to repeat=20 like this, and thus it has been thought that the burst signals the=20 destruction of the source.

The best data came from the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory and were=20 presented December 18th at a meeting of high-energy physicists in=20 Chicago. It's not certain that all four flares have a single source,=20 but that's the most likely conclusion based on the satellite data.=20 Because they originate from so far away, gamma-ray bursts are=20 considered the most energetic events in the known universe.=20

Comet Hale-Bopp (C/1995 O1)

By the numbers Comet Hale-Bopp is still separated about 20
 27 degrees from the Sun, but most of that is in declination, 20
 and the comet is quite difficult to pick out in the evening 20
 sky. By January 20th its elongation from the Sun will be 34=20
 and it could optimistically be shining at around magnitude 1.5.=20
 We can only hope so. So, with these final 1996 positions, given=20
 for 0 hours Universal Time, we bid Hale-Bopp a brief "Auf=20
 Wiedersehen"=:20

Comet Hale-Bopp		R. A.	Decl.
December 22		18h 28.5m	+2=B0 37.6'
December 24		18h 31.2m	+3=B0 00.0'
December 26		18h 33.9m	+3=B0 26.4'
December 28		18h 36.7m	+3=B0 51.9'

For more information about Comet Hale-Bopp from the editors of=20
 Sky & Telescope, including images and animations, see SKY Online's=20
 Comet Page.=20

Aldebaran Occultation

The Moon occults the bright star Aldebaran on the evening of=20
 December 22nd. This event occurs around 22:30 Universal Time,=20
 so those in the Eastern Hemisphere will have best view. It=20
 should also be visible from the East Coast of the U.S., but=20
 the Sun will still be up farther west. See page 77 of the=20
 January 1996 Sky & Telescope for details, or visit the=20
 Internet site

<http://www.sky.net/~robinson/1222grz.htm>.=20

December's Solstice

The Sun ushers in winter for the Northern Hemisphere -- and=20
 summer in the Southern -- on December 21st at 9:06 a.m.=20
 Eastern Standard Time (14:06 Universal Time).=20

Carl E. Sagan (1934-1996)

We join the rest of the astronomical world -- and the general=20
 public -- in mourning the loss of Carl Sagan on December 20th=20
 at age 62. A professor of astronomy at Cornell University and=20
 a scientific popularizer known worldwide, he died of pneumonia=20
 after a two-year battle with a bone-marrow disease called=20
 myelodysplasia. Sagan's principal research interests were=20
 planetary exploration and searching for life in the universe.=20
 He was also the author of many books, and his Cosmos television=20
 series remains very popular more than 15 years after its initial=20
 broadcast. Sagan and his wife, Ann Druyan, were just finishing=20
 the second edition of the book Comet, which will be published=20
 early next year by Ballantine Books.=20

THIS WEEK'S "SKY AT A GLANCE"

Some daily events in the changing sky, from the editors of=20
 SKY & TELESCOPE

DEC. 22 -- SUNDAY

* Around sunset or in early evening, the waxing gibbous Moon=20
 occults (covers) the 1st-magnitude star Aldebaran for viewers=20
 who are north of a line running from the mouth of the Saint=20
 Lawrence River through central Illinois. At Chicago the star=20

VENUS is the "Morning Star" very low in the southeast during=20 dawn.

MARS, near the Leo-Virgo border, rises in the east around=20 11:30 p.m. and shines high in the south before dawn. It appears=20 halfway from Regulus to Spica.

JUPITER is very low in the southwest during dusk, to the upper=20 left of fainter Mercury as described above.

SATURN, in Pisces, is the brightest "star" high in the south at=20 dusk. It moves to high in the southwest later in the evening and=20 sets by midnight.

URANUS and NEPTUNE are low in the sunset glow east of Jupiter.

PLUTO is low in the glow of sunrise.

(All descriptions that relate to your horizon or zenith are=20 written for the world's midnorthern latitudes. Descriptions that=20 also depend on your longitude are for North America.)

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