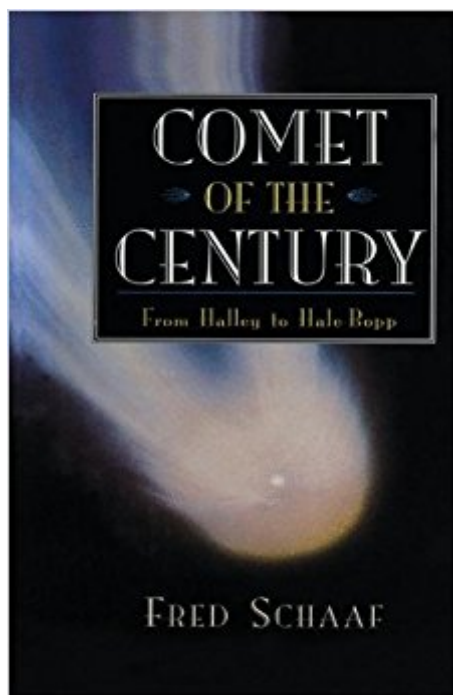


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Comet Of The Century: From Halley To Hale-Bopp



Synopsis

The present century has been a disappointing one for comets, but past centuries often featured spectacular, unforgettable comet shows that dominated the night (and even daytime) sky for months: comets that outshone Venus or even the Moon, whose spectacular tails stretched more than halfway across the sky or were weirdly split, and whose apparition was held responsible for everything from wars to unusually good wine vintages. Published to coincide with the first naked-eye appearance of Comet Hale-Bopp, perhaps our own comet of the century, this book is an irresistible guide to comet facts and lore throughout history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Don't be fooled by the title. True, this book was inspired by Comet Hale-Bopp, which has come and gone, but it's really about comets in general--only three of the fifteen chapters are about Hale-Bopp--so this book is still worth reading. The author discusses what comets are, how comets have figured in history, how they form, and the wonders of great comets like Halley's . The author has a lively, friendly style that readily communicates his enthusiasm for the subject. That, plus the clear and substantial writing, make this book a joy to read. He does for comets what Ken Croswell's book PLANET QUEST does for extrasolar planets. Highly recommended--even if you can't see Hale-Bopp any more.

Having read this book after the fact, I didn't get to experience the anticipation that the author so

obviously felt about the impending arrival of Hale-Bopp. As far as I could tell (and admittedly I am no astronomer), Hale-Bopp was not really spectacular. I did see it on the western horizon a couple of times, and it was interesting but not particularly exciting. Reading the tales of other comets was much more fun for me. I heard my grandmother talk about the 1910 appearance of Halley's Comet, and how it frightened so many people. Her father was a Lutheran minister, and many of his congregation came to him asking if it was the end of the world. His answer was, "If it is the end of the world, there's nothing we can do about. I'm going to bed. Good-night." Even though we know so much more about comets nowadays, they are still a frightening phenomenon for many people, and some even go crazy. Witness the suicide cult in California who thought a spaceship would be accompanying Hale-Bopp especially to pick them up! But even though Hale-Bopp was a dud (at least for the layperson), I think this book is very enlightening for the historical perspective. The author's enthusiasm for his subject makes his writing very entertaining, and he doesn't bore the average person with technical jargon and erudition.

Although written with the then forthcoming appearance of comet Hale-Bopp in mind, this book well repays reading now that Hale-Bopp has left the inner solar system. The accounts of prior comets, laced with the author's personal experiences, were fascinating. I hope that a great comet of the 21st century appears, so that Schaaf can update this book and include a report on his observations of Hale-Bopp to match those he gives of comet Hyakutake.

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