

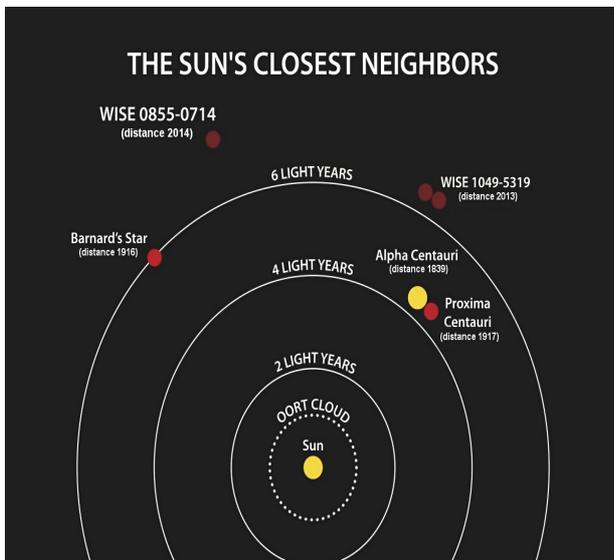
Astronomy In The Two Dales

February

“ It’s coming straight for us “ gasped the starman , as he burst into the post office . Gazing up at him from beneath furrowed brows , he who wears shorts , sighed , “ what , exactly , is coming straight for us ? “ Gliese 710 , it will plow through the Oort cloud , scattering comets . WE ARE DOOMED ! “ Not again , thought the beshorted one , last week it was space probe stealing aliens and now this. “Well , I suppose you had better write it all down “ he returned to sorting the round shiny metal disks , that sat on the counter surface in between himself and the amorphous shape of the starman that loomed over him.....

The big news this month is a lunar eclipse , occurring when the moon is full , on the 11th of this month. The moon will pass through the earth’s shadow , so it will not be totally dark. A full moon at this time of year is sometimes known as a snow moon or a hunger moon.

The new moon does not appear until the 26th , and as the moon is rising at 10 pm accompanied by the planet Jupiter , we have an opportunity to observe Mars and Venus setting in the west. Both planets will have set by 9 pm , the best time for observation is between 5pm and 7.30pm , as earth’s atmosphere distorts the light from bright objects and makes them appear fuzzy.



Our solar system interacts with other star systems in our local area of space. These stars move toward and away from our solar system as they orbit around their own gravitational centres , none of the stars in the above diagram will approach closer than 1 light year , however , that may be close enough to disturb chunks of ice and rock that orbit our sun in the Oort cloud , creating comets that will head towards the sun .

Gliese 710 is a rogue star , not bound to any one point in space and at this moment it is heading straight for our solar system. At present we cannot calculate it’s speed only how it increases in brightness , as it is coming at us head on , there is no way we can see a side view of it’s movement to assess it’s speed. So , at present , our calculations indicate that Gliese 710 will pass through or near to our solar system in 1.35 million years , or maybe sooner.

...sensing disdain , the starman left and drifted nebulously over the green. With a start the wearer of the thigh cuff woke “ a dream...thank the gods”.

“ It’s coming straight for us “ gasped the starman , as he burst into the post office. He of the naked knee screamed.....

