Fireworks from the outer spaces Perseid meteors peak August 11 & 12

"See that shooting star? . . . Oh, it's gone!" On any clear night you can see meteors cross the sky. All you need is patience, and on the average you can spot six or seven each hour. But at certain times of the year, meteors are noticeably more abundant as the earth passes through regions of space containing large numbers of meteoroids, thought to be debris scattered by comets as they move within the vicinity of the sun.

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This August, enthusiasts of these "celestial streakers" will gather at sites far from the cities' glare and bright lights for a first-hand look at the famed Perseid Meteors, sometimes referred to as "The Tears of Saint Laurence" since they occur around the time of the Feast of Saint Laurence on August 10.

The show has already begun, in case you haven't noticed, but the real spectacle will debut Saturday night, August 9, and reach maximum intensity two nights later. The forerunners of the Perseid swarm begin to appear as only a handful for an entire night's watch around July 20. By August 9, one might average a meteor sighting every five or six minutes. On the night of maximum activity, late Monday, August 11, into the early morning hours of Tuesday, August 12, a person with perfect viewing conditions will see the display grow in intensity each hour as the constellation Perseus climbs higher into the northeastern sky. Just before dawn, Perseids will be piercing the atmosphere at the rate of about one meteor per

Chester Wittell Poetry

WHY POETS LIVE IN GARRETS

'Tis said a certain poet and a parrot Once lived together in a dingy garret, And that the poet used to spend his time Teaching the parrot how to speak in rhyme. Although with endless patience did he try, His poems, it seems, the public would not buy. He even sold the shabby coat he wore And tried to hawk his verse from door to door; Until at last he said: "Though it be folly, I think I'm going to teach my poems to polly." minute, with sometimes as many as two or three.

The darker the backdrop of the night sky, as well as how much of the night sky you can see, are the determining factors of how many meteors will be visible to a single observer. For instance, in mountain areas the nights can be velvet black-perfect viewing conditions for spying even the quickest and faintest streak. In suburban areas, the sky background lightens up significantly, especially when you look towards large adjacent cities. It is possible to watch the Perseids from a large metropolitan area, but even in the relative darkness of a city park on the peak night, only five to ten meteors will be visible each hour. In a city you will also be contending with local smoke and haze, as well as bright lights and tall buildings.

Two conditions are conspiring to make this year's Perseids a spectacular show. First, they nearly coincide with a new moon, unlike last year when the moon was at a gibbous (3/4 full) phase and washed the sky of all but the brightest meteors-this year skies will stay dark all night long. Also, according to British and Canadian meteor experts, the earth will be running to the "core" of the meteor stream sometime between 10:00 pm EDT August 11 and 4:00 am EDT August 12. So, much of North America will be on the night side of the earth when the Perseids reach their peak in what could be the finest meteor display in some years.

meaning "things in the air." Clouds, rain, snow and lightning would also fit this description. The Persieds, however, are lifeless bits of dust and ice orbiting in interplanetary space where there is no air. Meteors are so small and fragile that they rarely penetrate deeper than 60 miles or so above the earth. Even the "big" meteors are no more than pea-sized. According to Todd Gross, chief meteorologist of Compu-Weather, inc., Flushing, New York, "meteors make such a splash in the sky because their speed is 37 miles per second (134,000 mph), about 100 times the speed of a rifle bullet. This friction

Greek word "meteora,"

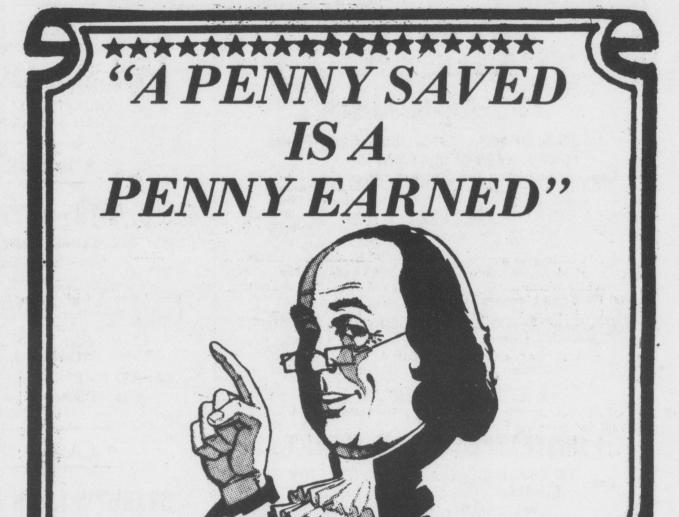
with our atmosphere raises them to white-hot heat in a flash, causing the display."

In recent years, Persied watchers have noticed an increase in the incidence of fireball meteors. Some have been particularly striking. In 1977 a Perseid seen over Arkansas almost matched the glow of a quarter-moon, while the next year a meteor rivaling the full-moon blazed over Scandinavia!

It has been suggested that these big meteors may be related to the Swift-Tuttle comet, which probably began shedding the cosmic debris we know as the Perseids some 40,000 years ago. The earth crosses paths with this comet's orbit each August. The Swift-Tuttle

comet was last seen in 1862. It should return anytime between now and mid-1983. but due to uncertainties in orbital calculations we're not completely certain of this. The fact that the Perseids seem to have gained in intensity these past few years appears to be circumstantial evidence that the comet is indeed out there and on its way back in toward the vicinity of the earth and sun. The pieces of meteoric debris causing these fireballs may, in essence, be "heralding" the arrival of the main bodythe comet.

If the above theory is valid, it spells more potential dazzlers in this year's Perseid show.



SUSQUEHANNA TIME-Page 9

One day two matrons of society Went slumming, living's underside to see. The day was warm and as a parrot will, The bird was perched upon a window-sill, Squawking according to its wonted use The poet's gleaning of the lyric muse. One of the matrons, pausing as she heard The rhymed recital of the mimic bird, Said, looking upward spell-bound to the garrett: "How wonderful! just listen to that parrot."

From DARKENED DOOR.

-Chester Wittell

"CARK"

Speaking of four-lettered words, There's one in every dictionary That should be yanked out, put to work By every Tom and Dick and Harry.

The word is spelled: C, A, R, K. It means "the care you're giving To the green-backed folding stuff it takes To pay for decent living."

So worry on, my worthy friend, And may God save the mark. If anyone asks, "What's the matter?" Say, "I've got the cark."

-Chester Wittell

The most comfortable observing platform is a reclining lawn chair with a sleeping bag a close second. Lie back, look straight overhead and into the northeast.

The number of meteors isn't all that makes the Perseids the most popular of the dozen or so annual meteor swarms. Swifter and brighter than other displays, they occasionally leave thin, bright incandescent smoke trails that quickly fade out like ribbons of fire left by a skyrocket.

In the evening hours, the meteors will be catching earth from behind in its orbit, and will appear to move slowly on long paths across the sky ("falling stars"). These pre-midnight Perseids are usually tinted orange and gold. After midnight when Perseids are striking earth more or less head-on, you're more likely to see the swifter "shooting stars" which appear as short, bright streaks of light sometimes ending in flames or exploding-the so-called "fireballs" or "Bolides." The word meteor is a distortion of the original

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