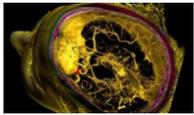


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Comet passing Sun could promise bright lights in sky



Rex Features

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There could be some bright lights in the night sky in the run-up to Christmas. Comet ISON - which was discovered only in 2012 - is speeding towards a fiery encounter with the Sun. And if it survives, it could lead to some bright displays in the sky. VoR's Scott Craig spoke to Alan Fitzsimmons, professor of astro-physics at Queens University Belfast.

Ison is expected to pass close to the sun later this week.

It's being keenly watched by scientists, hoping to learn more about how comets are formed.

Fitzsimmons said: "ISON is not on the collision course with the Sun. The important thing to realise is that the comet will not collide with the Sun. However, it will pass very close to the Sun. Under such intense heating, what we're interested to find out is that how does the comet respond under those circumstances. Particularly this comet, which has never been around the Sun before.

"So, there're two things we're looking out for. First of all, we're looking at the material that the comet is ejecting so close to the Sun. And this is going to give a really good idea about what a comet is made of. Particularly in the sub-surface layers, which generally we do not get a good view of. Secondly, it's going to give us a good idea about how a comet is put together. When it's at its closest point to the Sun, on Thursday afternoon, about 6.45 UK time, the comet will be under tremendous thermal stress from the heating due to the Sun, it's also going to be under great stress from the intense gravitational field of the Sun, when it's that close - and therefore we probably expect that some part of the comet will fragment or break apart."

(Voice of Russia)

Scott Craig

Astrology, Sun, Comet Ison, News

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