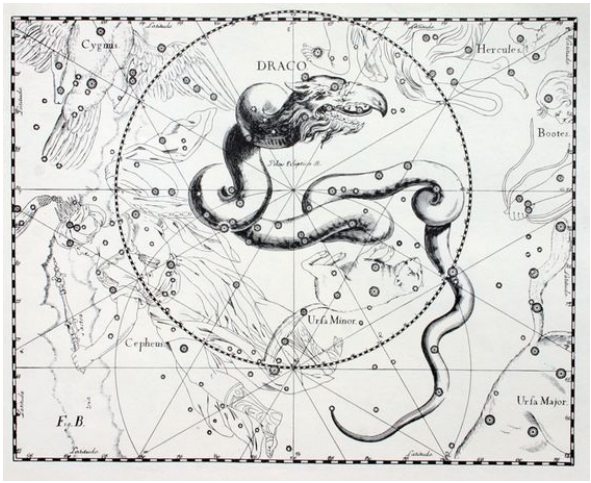
SPECTACULAR DRACONID METEOR SHOWER?
Sorry, not for us in Melbourne

In 2018, there's no moon to spoil the show. The parent comet recently passed near. Best night is likely October 8. To see the most meteors … watch in the evening, not after midnight. And find a dark country sky!

October's Draconid meteor shower is sometimes called the Giacobinids after its discoverer **Michel Giacobini**, who discovered the comet on December 20, 1900. Another sighting in 1913 added Zinner to the comet's name, which thus became 21P/Giacobini-Zinner. In 2018, a new Moon on October 9 means no moonlight to drown the meteors in its glare.

The Draconid shower is usually a sleeper, rarely offering any more than 5 meteors per hour. **But watch out if the Dragon awakes! The Draconid meteor shower produced awesome meteor displays in 1933 and 1946, with thousands of meteors per hour seen in those years. European observers saw over 600 meteors per hour in 2011.** Will 2018's Draconid shower be spectacular? Meteors in annual showers tend to storm when their parent comets are nearby. In 2018, the Draconids' parent – Comet 21P/Giacobini-Zinner – reached its perihelion or closest point to the Sun on September 10. That's close! Is it close enough? Many are saying it's possible we'll see elevated levels of Draconids this year. Or, on the other hand, it's possible we won't.



The constellation Draco from Uranographia by Johannes Hevelius, 1690,

The shower is active between October 6 and 10. The best evening to watch is likely October 8; try the evenings of October 7 and 9 also. Notice the word evening. This is one shower you don't have to stay up late to see. Start watching first thing at nightfall. Be sure to watch under a dark, open, country sky.

This annual meteor shower happens when Earth in its orbit crosses the orbital path of Comet 21P/Giacobini-Zinner. Debris left behind by this comet collides with the Earth's upper atmosphere, to burn up as Draconid meteors. This comet has an orbital period of about 6.6 years. It's about 6 times more distant at its farthest point from the Sun than at its nearest point. At aphelion – its most distant point – it's farther out than the planet Jupiter. At perihelion – its closest point to the Sun – it's about the Earth's distance from the Sun. On rare occasions – when the peak of the shower coincides with the comet's perihelion – this shower has been known to rain down hundreds or even thousands of meteors in an hour. The last perihelion of the comet was September 10, 2018. On that same night, Comet 21P/Giacobini-Zinner came closer to Earth than it had in 72 years. That was fun … but does that recent perihelion of the comet mean the Draconids will be spectacular in 2018? So far, reports of a possibly spectacular Draconid display in 2018 are all speculation. For people who enjoy meteor showers, that's part of the fun! As a wise person once said, meteor showers are like fishing. You go, and sometimes you catch something. You don't have to locate Draco the Dragon to watch the Draconids. These meteors fly every which way through the starry sky. Draconids radiate from near the Dragon's Eyes: the stars Eltanin and Rastaban. Familiar with the Summer Triangle? Draw an imaginary line from Altair through Vega and it will point to them. Can you see the Draconids from the Southern Hemisphere? It's possible. But if you're so far south that the radiant point in the constellation Draco doesn't rise above your horizon, or rises only briefly, you won't catch many. Nevertheless it is nice to know about these astronomical events and place them correctly in your mind.

AK, with EarthSky and Wikipedia Notes