

Comet Hunter

from *The Poetry of Science*

By: Holly Thompson

Adapted by Fishtank Staff

- 1 ever since he was a schoolboy
studying the Great Comet Ikeya-Seki
Yuji Hyakutake had wanted
to discover a comet
- 5 so he moved to Kagoshima
with clear mountain air
and night after night
while his wife and sons slept
he aimed his huge binoculars
- 10 at one patch of eastern sky
- memorizing the stars
their exact locations
sketching positions
of constellations
- 15 hoping for a rare
blaze of ice and dust
- until late one winter night
he spotted not-so-bright 1995 Y1
then the next month, near
- 20 libra and Hydra—another
- "I must be dreaming," he thought
as he sketched and photographed
measured and documented
till day dawned on the mountain
- 25 "Possible comet," he reported
then waited as top astronomers
at the National Observatory in Tokyo
checked and finally confirmed
he was the first to discover 1996 B2
- 30 soon, as the orbit neared earth,
everyone was gazing up
at that glow of ice and dust
with the long sweep of tail—
at the newly named, the truly Great
- 35 Comet Hyakutake