

Comet Hunter

from *The Poetry of Science*

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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