

Astronomers discover a stellar puzzle

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Astronomers in Northern Ireland are trying to explain a puzzle discovered this decade -- a bright 2004 stellar flare followed two years later by a supernova.

The incredibly bright flare was followed by a type 1b supernova in the same place, making the two events an unlikely coincidence and something of a puzzle.

Andrea Pastorello and colleagues at Queens University in Belfast are offering a few explanations. They posit the initial flare could have come from a Wolf-Rayet star -- a very hot, massive, dying star that throws out a lot of gas. Or it could have come from a binary system, containing the supernova and a luminous blue variable -- a bright, hypergiant, variable star that flares periodically.

The conclusions in this week's issue of the journal *Nature* and support another study by an independent group of astronomers in the journal *Astrophysics*.

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