

'Witch Head' brews baby stars

October 31 2013



An infrared portrait of the Witch Head nebula from NASA's Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer, or WISE, shows billowy clouds where new stars are brewing.
Image credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

(Phys.org) —A witch appears to be screaming out into space in this new image from NASA's Wide-Field Infrared Survey Explorer, or WISE. The infrared portrait shows the Witch Head nebula, named after its resemblance to the profile of a wicked witch. Astronomers say the billowy clouds of the nebula, where baby stars are brewing, are being lit up by massive stars. Dust in the cloud is being hit with starlight, causing it to glow with infrared light, which was picked up by WISE's detectors.

The Witch Head nebula is estimated to be hundreds of light-years away in the Orion constellation, just off the famous hunter's knee.

WISE was recently "awakened" to hunt for asteroids in a program called NEOWISE. The reactivation came after the spacecraft was put into hibernation in 2011, when it completed two full scans of the sky, as planned.

Provided by NASA

Citation: 'Witch Head' brews baby stars (2013, October 31) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-10-witch-brews-baby-stars.html>

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