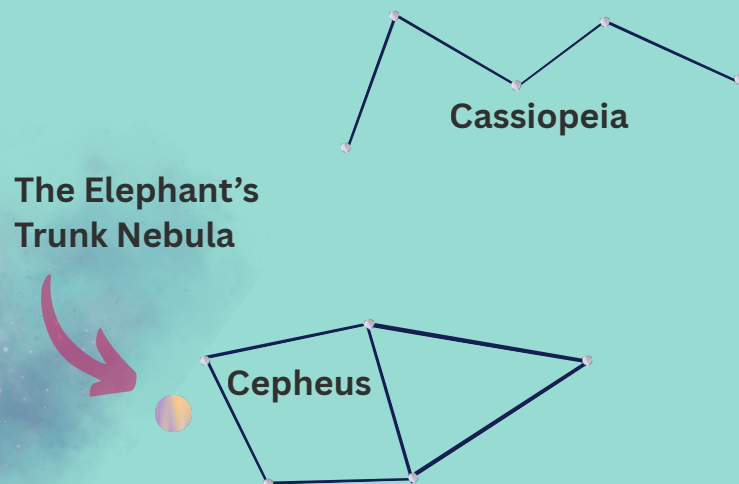


THE ELEPHANT TRUNK NEBULA

2,400 light-years away lies the Elephant's Trunk Nebula, a large swathe of nebulous gas glowing with the energy of newborn stars in its region.

The speed of light is the fastest thing in the Universe, but even so, the light from this object left 2400 years ago, so we see it as it was in 374 BC.

The Nebula lies in the Constellation of Cepheus, a king of Aethiopia in Greek mythology. Cepheus is a circumpolar constellation, rotating around the Northern celestial pole all year round between Cassiopeia and Draco the Dragon.



The Nebula is made up from two parts - the glowing gas and the dark dust jutting into it, giving rise to the Elephant's Trunk name. The whole region is lit by the powerful ultraviolet radiation radiating from the new stars peppering the nebula.

The Trunk itself is a star forming region - containing a large number of very young stars, some only 100,000 years old, barely anything compared to our Sun's age of 4.5 billion years. In the circular cavity of the curl of the Trunk, a couple of new stars can be seen - these are around two million years old, still very young.

The hole in the Trunk has carved out by the stellar wind from these two new stars allowing us to see through the dust to shining nebula in the background. As the stellar wind of fast moving particles continues to move away from these stars, they in turn trigger new star formation in the surrounding area.