

Update on the Nibiru 2012 Doomsday

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Public concern about doomsday in December 2012 has grown since my SKEPTICAL INQUIRER article a year ago (“The Myth of Nibiru and the End of the World in 2012,” September/October 2008). The concern has invaded cable TV and Hollywood, spreading internationally. As a result, many originally unrelated threads have joined the doomsday chorus, including Nostradamus believers, a variety of eschatological Christian, Native American, and spiritualist sects, and those who fear comet and asteroid impacts or violent solar storms. All agree that terrible things will happen to the Earth in 2012, but many also assert that this will be the beginning of a new age of happiness and spiritual growth for the survivors.

This story began with predictions that Nibiru, supposedly a planet discovered by the Sumerians, is headed toward Earth. Zecharia Sitchin, who writes fiction about the ancient Mesopotamian civilization of Sumer, claimed in several books (e.g., *The Twelfth Planet*, published in 1976) that he has found and translated Sumerian documents that identify the planet Nibiru, orbiting the Sun every 3,600 years. Sitchin has sold many books about these Sumerian fables, which include stories of “ancient astronauts” called the Anunnaki who aided the Sumerians. Then Nancy Lieder, a self-declared psychic who claims she communicates with aliens, wrote on her Web site ZetaTalk that inhabitants of a fictional planet around the star Zeta Reticuli warned her that the Earth was in danger from Planet X, or Nibiru. This

catastrophe was initially predicted for May 2003, but when nothing happened, the doomsday date was moved to December 2012.

These two Nibiru fables were greatly amplified when linked with the turn-over of the Mayan long-count calendar at or near the winter solstice of 2012. Many Web sites sprang up declaring that December 21, 2012, would be the end of the world, a time of violent physical and spiritual transformation—never mind that the real end for Mayan civilization came several hundred years earlier with the European invasion of the Americas. This spring I counted more than 175 books on the 2012 doomsday listed on Amazon.com, where the most popular themes are the Mayan calendar and ways to survive the coming apocalypse.

Of course, Nibiru does not exist. A large planet (or a brown dwarf) in our solar system would have been known to astronomers for decades, both indirectly from its gravitational perturbations on other objects and by direct detection in the infrared. The NASA Infrared Astronomy Satellite (IRAS) carried out the first all-sky survey in 1983, which, along with several subsequent surveys, would have seen Nibiru if it was there. However, the Nibiru proponents have asserted that Nibiru was hiding—that it remained behind the Sun for several years or that it could be seen only from the South Pole. Both of these are geometrically absurd statements. Most of the so-called Nibiru photos on the Web are lens flare produced when a camera points at a bright source,

an artifact also responsible for many UFO photos. As it approaches Earth, of course, Nibiru should be increasing in brightness. In fact, if it were going to be inside Earth’s orbit in three years, it should have already reached naked-eye visibility, and tens of thousands of astronomers, both amateur and professional, would be tracking it.

As the story grows in complexity, many more doomsday scenarios are being suggested, often unrelated to Nibiru. These include a reversal of the Earth’s magnetic field, severe solar storms associated with the eleven-year solar cycle (which may peak in 2012), a reversal of Earth’s rotation axis, a 90 degree flip of the rotation axis, bombardment by large comets or asteroids, and bombardment by gamma rays or various unspecified lethal rays coming from the center of the Milky Way Galaxy or the “dark rift” seen in a nearby galactic spiral arm. A major theme has become celestial alignments, which fascinate laypersons. Supposedly, the Sun will align with the galactic center (or maybe with the Milky Way Dark Rift) on December 21, 2012, subjecting us to ~~potentially deadly cosmic~~

David Morrison is the senior scientist at the NASA Astrobiology Institute, where, among other things, he answers questions from the public submitted to the Web-based “Ask an Astrobiologist.” A fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, Morrison is a recipient of the Carl Sagan Medal of the American Astronomical Society for his contributions to public understanding of science.

All of these pseudoscientific claims, together with distrust of the government, are being amplified by publicity for the new film from Columbia Pictures, titled simply “2012,” to be released in November 2009. The film’s trailer, appearing in theaters and on its Web site, www.whowillsurvive2012.com, shows a tidal wave breaking over the Himalayas with only the following words: “How would the governments of our planet prepare 6 billion people for the end of the world? [long pause] They wouldn’t. [long pause] Find out the Truth. Google search 2012.”

to be on the History Channel and the Discovery Channel. Much of the recent coverage focuses on Nostradamus (who else?), who is now credited with predicting doomsday in 2012. The story has also been reported on Fox News, and I anticipate intensified media coverage over the next three years.

The doomsday scenario is spreading internationally; about half the questions I receive about Nibiru 2012 on my Web site now come from outside the U.S. Many write from India, saying they read about Nibiru in the newspapers. A jour-

nalist said that many people in Russia “are anxious by problem Nibiru.” A correspondent from Pakistan wrote, “The propaganda of 2012 is rising day by day... why is NASA not condemning these hoax?” The theme of censorship is often raised. One woman asked, “why doesn’t you and your government put a ban on the TV shows and report telecasting about Nibiru. If US can step to protect the world physically from terrorism, why can’t it protect us mentally from these news, if they are hoax?” Another woman pleaded, “I have four little babies and I think all of the human race deserves to know the truth from you ‘experts’. If it’s real then do the right thing; if not quit letting these hoaxes confuse true issues please.”

I continue to receive several e-mail questions every day about Nibiru and 2012, sent to the NASA Web site “Ask an Astrobiologist” (www.astrobiology.nasa.gov/ask-an-astrobiologist/), see the box

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The film’s publicity includes creation of a faux scientific Web site (www.instituteforhumancontinuity.org/) for “The Institute for Human Continuity,” which is entirely fictitious. According to this Web site, the IHC is dedicated to scientific research and public preparedness. Its mission is the survival of mankind, and the Institute was supposedly founded in 1978 by international leaders of government, business, and science. In 2004, it claims, IHC scientists confirmed with 94 percent certainty that the world would be destroyed in 2012. This Web site encourages people to register for a lottery to select those who will be saved; a colleague of mine submitted the name of her cat, which was accepted. I learned from Wikipedia that creating fake Web sites is a recent advertising technique called viral marketing, analogous to computer viruses.

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below for some examples received during just two weeks in May 2009. Many questioners are frightened, angry, or both. To my surprise, I have not seen much evidence that other scientists or skeptics are concerned about this growing outbreak of pseudoscience. More than a hundred

past replies of mine are posted on the astrobiology Web site and also referenced on the NASA home page (www.nasa.gov). A few news blogs such as Yahoo also provide truthful answers, but these are drowned out by the 2012 hysteria. I give credit to Wikipedia, which has sev-

eral entries on Nibiru, including a very good overview of the pseudoscience under "Nibiru collision." But questions keep streaming in, and I fear this will not be my last update on this subject. □

Messages to 'Ask an Astrobiologist,' May 2009

I am terrified about the recent talk about poles reversing and 2012. Do I need to prepare myself and accept this?

In late December 2012, three planets will line up correct? And the earth will pass next to the black hole in orion's belt, and turn our planet upside down. My question is, will the earth's gravity withstand it and hold us up and the oceans from going wild?

According to NASA scientists, the earth will stand still for about three days and then, in one hour, rotate a full 90 degrees (the geographical pole shift) during which time winds will be an average of 200 miles per hour. Every volcano on earth will erupt and of course there will be many earthquakes, so two thirds of earth's population will die in that one hour. Is this true??

How can an astrobiologist have anything to say scientifically about nibiru, the Shumerian planet? With scientists around the world finding facts in the existing scriptures on everything else, including Pluto, then why would we not believe them about nibiru? How can we say nibiru doesn't exist if science is only in the past few decades catching up with a science that has existed before civilized man?

There are various recent pictures and videos of an unidentified object that is beside the sun. If it is not Planet X what is it? I myself took a picture of the sun and have also captured the same object.

I am a legal administrative assistant and, having done my share of investigation, I find that the fact that the sun will pass in front of the earth and roughly eclipse the black hole at the centre of the Milky Way on Dec 21, 2012 decidedly compelling. There seems to be so much real evidence supporting the fact that something extraordinary is happening or going to happen, that I cannot simply dismiss it.

If Nibiru is a hoax, please explain to me why have you not tried to confirm this with the media to at least drain some fear out of the many people who are falling for this hoax.

Someone has said that the Nibiru can be visible by our eyes since 15th May 2009 in south hemisphere. Someone also said that you, NASA have known this planet X, Nibiru since 1983. I really feel afraid of the end of world. Please tell me the truth!!

Why NASA is hiding facts about nibiru? It really exists beyond pluto. There is photo proof for that. It seems to me that you and NASA hide something big.

I am from Pakistan, and here the propaganda of 2012 is rising day by day. A lot of people is doing business from 2012. My question is why is NASA not condemning these hoax?

Why doesn't you and your government

put a ban on the TV shows and report telecasting about Nibiru? If US can step to protect the world physically from terrorism, why can't it protect us mentally from these news, if they are hoax?

If you claim that the nibiru planet is a hoax why is there actual footage from the nasa stating that the planet exists?

I am a Russian journalist. We in this country have many people who are anxious about problem Nibiru. I know that serious scientists including in the USA do not accept Nibiru theory of Zecharia Sitchin. But tell, please, who from the scientific USA does not support even the existence of Nibiru?

I don't believe NASA. Nibiru will throw modern-day science as we know it for a loop. NASA knows it's there, but all will be revealed soon. . . . So why are you not telling the truth? Please answer me, I'm a boy, and I'm 16 years old.

If Nibiru is such a hoax then why was it on the History Channel and why don't you guys have censors for such "hoaxes" then? I have four little babies and I think all of the human race deserves to know the truth from you "experts". If it's real then do the right thing; if not quit letting these hoaxes confuse true issues please.