



The North Texas

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The real dangers of Armageddon

by Bret Cantwell

The world was supposed to end on May 15th 2003 when a brown dwarf passed through the solar system causing catastrophic upheaval and killing 90% of life on Earth. Though it did not happen, this so-called "Planet X" may still represent a danger to life and livelihood.

To some skeptics, the belief in "Planet X" has taken on the nature of a cult religion, and one of the belief's main advocates, Nancy Lieder, seems to have a Messiah Complex. An overview of the tenets of what is referred to as "Zetacult" as well as statements and actions by Ms. Lieder shows clear evidence of this occurring.

Zetatalc, a word used for Ms. Lieder's agenda, web site and her persona when she supposedly channels aliens from Zeta Reticuli started in 1995. What has developed since then is far from warmed over Velikovsky, and it is possible that a handful to thousands have embraced her apocalyptic vision. Therein lies the potential for tragedy. Some cults, like Jehovah's Witnesses survive the passing of a set date for doomsday. Some, like Heaven's Gate don't. At the very least there is the possibility of lasting psychological damage to believers realizing they've been duped.

Zetatalc as cult religion

UFO religions and cults are classified as such because they have replaced an incorporeal deity with aliens who serve the same purpose. Other UFO movements have inculcated other religious motifs such as agents of evil, a creative or apocalyptic narrative and a "heaven" or better life at some point. As seen with Heaven's Gate, these tenets can be deadly.

- A god who is "up there somewhere," who cares about Earthlings, has power and knowledge far beyond ours and is looking out for us has been replaced in the Zetacult by the Zetas who are the inhabitants of Zeta Reticuli.
- Agents of evil who known as demons or heretics are manifested in Zetacult by government officials and astronomers who are part of a cabal to prevent the

EVENTS CALENDAR

July Program

Saturday, July 12, 2003, 2:00 pm, at the Center for Community Cooperation 2900 Live Oak, (just east of downtown) Dallas

Exploding Popular Myths

This is an audience participation event. You know for a fact you should not drink lots of water during vigorous sports. But is this really true? The skeptical panel knows. The audience will test its knowledge to answer the age-old question: "Is it a hit or a myth?"

Saturday, 26 July, 7:30 p.m.

NTS Social Dinner and Board Meeting

Black-eyed Pea Restaurant, Forest Lane in Dallas one block west of Central Expressway. Contact us if you plan to come. We sometimes cancel or reschedule this event.

214-335-9248 (hotline)

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“good news” of Planet X from getting out. To believers, NASA
 is the devil.

- An apocalyptic “end time,” such as Ragnarok or the events in Revelation occur for the Zetacult when Planet X arrives. A new world is promised to believers who follow the salvation plan offered by the Zetas.
- Religious sacred texts contain tenets, methods of salvation or describe the actions (including battles with the enemy) of deities and messiahs. For Zetacult, the texts are easily accessible at www.zetatalk.com. Tenets of faith about Ms. Lieder, Planet X and the Zetas, words of wisdom on a variety of spiritual and scientific topics, methods of surviving Planet Xs arrival so that you can live in the “heaven” of the post arrival world and transcripts of Ms. Lieder’s battles with the demons (transcripts of IRC chats with astronomers and skeptics) are all available there.
- Prophecy or future sight is used by many religions to demonstrate the higher knowledge of god. Adherents then wait for fulfillment (sometimes with very tortured logic or thin evidence) to proclaim the “truth” of their religion because their god knew of future events. Zetatalk.com has a page dedicated to supposed fulfillments of Ms Lieder’s Zeta channeled prophecies demonstrating the higher knowledge of the Zeta gods.
- Similar to prophecy are signs and wonders that supposedly demonstrate the truth of a religions tenets or as a demonstration that the end times are immanent. Zetatalk.com includes photos of Planet X that are either fakes or mistakes. Ms. Lieder is also making claims about earthquakes and weather phenomena to prove the Planet X end times is upon us.
- Much like Catholic and Orthodox Christianity or Sunni and Shiaa Islam, Zetacult endured a schism between Ms. Lieder and a man named Mark Hazlewood. Amid accusations of money-making schemes and copyright violations the two split and are now trying position themselves as the inheritor of Planet X truth.
- Cults often develop a siege mentality and seek to isolate themselves from influences that might interfere with total adherence to cult dogma. Zetacult isolationism is primarily intellectual and seen mainly in their on-line presence. Believers heavily moderate and censor chat sessions and message boards and skeptics or dissenting opinions are removed just for asking questions.
- Cults and fringe sects of religion, such as Young Earth Creationists follow a simple credo - Science is bad, Revealed Knowledge is good. This credo is at the heart of the Zetacult. It doesn’t matter what some PhD is telling you. It doesn’t matter what some amature skywatcher with her own 8 inch telescope tells you. It doesn’t matter what mathematicians, astronomers, geologists or meteorologists are telling you. All that matters is Ms. Lieder’s revelations from the Zetas.
- Cults have charismatic leaders who get the good news out, recruit believers, do battle with agents of evil and tell followers

exactly how to live their lives. Some like Marshall Applewhite and David Koresh see themselves as messianic figures. This next section will show that Nancy Lieder sees herself to be one as well.

Nancy Lieder as Messiah

Ambitious people, out to save or change the world, have often seen themselves as historical figures. Some of them have crossed a threshold and begin to see themselves as divine agents or as deities themselves. The results have largely depended on circumstances and the levels of power attained by these individuals. In Alexander the great, the results were, unless one was Persian, generally neutral or positive. In Hitler they were devastating on a massive scale. With Messrs. Applewhite and Koresh tragedies occurred, but on a much smaller scale. Some of Ms. Lieder's claims put her in league with these last two, but luckily she doesn't have her believers ensconced in a compound. Keeping in mind the cult/religious aspects of Zetacult, an analysis of these claims clearly shows a messianic mindset.

- She claims to be a "chosen one of the Zeta gods."
- She claims to have exclusive access and to speak for the Zeta gods.
- She claims to be able to deliver humanity from the Planet X end times.
- She claims to be fighting against agents of evil that are out to spread disinformation and prevent the populace from accepting Zetacult's truth.
- Like Osiris, Bohidarma, Jesus and other message bringers, she claims to have suffered or gone through a trail to become the chosen one.

This quote is from the May 13, 2003, edition of Coast to Coast AM with George Noory:

"Because we could rely on her at this point in time. Uh, after years of, of intense pressure, um, ah, trying to gut her, ah, from every angle that affects a human being, um, to, ah, give up, walk away, um, close down her psyche, alter her message, um, make mistakes, uh, we could rely on her not to do that..."

In addition to her transformative ordeal, she sees herself as a social or intellectual martyr for her cause, and expresses a willingness to be physically martyred as well.

- She sees herself as emulating historical characters and that she'll be thought of as one as well. Again, from the May 13, 2003, Coast to Coast AM:

"I am Joan of Arc and Mother Theresa in essence..."

The Joan of Arc reference is a clear attempt to reinforce her martyr image as well.

- She claims to the gift of prophecy though revelations made to her when she channels the Zetas.
- She has an entire web site and publishing company dedicated to telling believers how to live their lives and what they must (move to safe area, euthanize pets) in order to make it through the Planet X end times.

It matters

People who argue against nonsense have many reasons for doing so. Some altruistically try and help their fellow man avoid being scammed out of money or pride while others just want to rid the world of kooks and kooky ideas. One of the most altruistic efforts a skeptic can make is trying to stop someone from ruining their lives or worse yet committing suicide over bogus beliefs like Planet X and the Zetacult. The arrival date for Planet X has passed, but the time for confronting Zetacult and Nancy Lieder has not.

For more information: Phil "Bad Astronomer" Plait has an excellent page fully debunking all things Planet X.

Bad Astronomy <http://www.badastronomy.com/>

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Supplement Robber Baron faces new charges

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

The FTC filed new federal charges against A. Glenn Braswell and four of his companies last May 27th.

Braswell's criminal career extends back to the 1970's when he began selling cures for baldness, aging, obesity and other conditions through the mail. By 1984 he had been sentenced to five years probation for mail fraud and a three year prison term for perjury and federal income tax evasion in connection with his activities. In 1983 he and his companies settled FTC charges of false advertising with the payment of \$610,000 in fines and

an agreement not to make claims not supported by reliable scientific evidence.

Braswell continued his activities nonetheless. In 1997, three sports figures, Richard Petty, Stan Musial and Len Dawson, sued him for misusing their names in ads for one of his products. Braswell went on to embarrass both major political parties. Shortly before the 2000 elections, for example, the Republican Party returned hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions made by the supplement mogul after adverse publicity. Months later, Braswell was among those who won a Presidential pardon in the hours before President George W. Bush's inauguration, apparently at the behest of the First Lady's brother, Hugh Rodham, who was promised a payment of \$200,000. Later in 2001, Braswell repeatedly invoked his Fifth Amendment rights rather than answer questions at a hearing of the US Senate Special Committee on Aging. At this hearing, Braswell's former Chief Financial Officer, Mike O'Neil, testified:

"What makes the Braswell companies unique to a handful of Marketers, is the predatory nature of the advertising message. The primary vehicle for the sale of products is a 50-page advertisement that is published monthly as the 'Journal of Longevity.' ... The magazine is presented in such a manner so as to suggest that it is a legitimate medical journal . [but] the articles are not written by medical professionals but rather by Braswell staff. Finally, the articles and ads contain outright false statements. . The articles routinely describe medical problems as life threatening, potentially deadly, causing severe illness or death. They are designed to scare and threaten the reader into purchasing the 'antidote' or at the very least trying the product for \$29.95. The products sold by the Braswell companies are rotated through the Journal with new product names and articles concocted as necessary. That is, if a product does not do well, it is renamed and given life in treating some other malady. . On more than one occasion, products were deemed to be ineffective and ads too outspoken and provocative for publication in marketing meetings, only to be overridden by Glenn Braswell ... What makes this activity inexcusable is that it takes advantage of people with legitimate medical needs who are susceptible to a message of miracle remedies and cures. What needs to be considered is not what the person, who is in pain, is thinking when they read the ad, because they want to believe, almost need to believe, but rather what does the person writing the ad know to be true. To the extent that there is a difference, there is fraud."

Last December, Braswell and two of his business associates were indicted on multiple charges of income tax evasion. The indictments were unsealed January 14th when Braswell was arrested at his Miami Beach, Florida home. If convicted on all counts, he could be imprisoned for a maximum of 51 years.

The products now complained of by the FTC are "Lung Support Formula" promoted as a treatment for respiratory disease, "Antibetic Pancreas Tonic" for diabetes, "GH3" and "Therapeutics GH3 Romanian Youth Formula" to extend lifespan and prevent or treat Alzheimer's disease, "Chitoplex," a chitosan product marketed for weight loss and "Testerex" which

is supposed to treat erectile dysfunction. The complaint charges that Braswell deceptively represented promotional materials for his products as an independent health-related magazine, "New Life Nutrition Magazine," much as he had with the previous "Journal of Longevity."

Braswell products also were claimed to have won awards for excellence from an independent "Council on Natural Nutrition" which was, in reality, nothing but yet another Braswell scheme, the "director" of which was on the payroll and a member of the Board of Directors of another of Braswell's companies.

The FTC complaint asks for permanent injunctions against these activities, consumer redress and a permanent ban on Braswell's involvement in the promotion or sales of any health-related products. It is safe to speculate that the authorities have finally realized that nothing short of a permanent ban will put a stop to Braswell's chicanery. But only time will tell whether these latest developments are the beginning of the end of the supplement tycoon's reign or little more than another bump in the road for a very persistent and resourceful entrepreneur.

Ephedrine on the defensive

Ephedrine continues to make news. On May 30th Cytodyne Technologies of Manasquan, N.J., was ordered by a San Diego court to repay \$12.5 million to consumers. The decision was the result of a class-action lawsuit alleging false advertising for the company's Xenadrine RFA-1 weight loss remedy. The damage figure represents the profits of the company from its California sales of Xenadrine RFA-1 from 1997 through 2001.

The company had claimed that the product, which it no longer sells, caused a "3,860 percent greater fat loss" on the basis of a small company-funded study in which subjects lost 1.93 % of their body fat as compared to .05% taking a placebo. In a New York Times article in May the attorney for Cytodyne was quoted as defending this as a common practice of "puffery" and complained "there's nothing illegal about puffing"

In other news, Illinois has banned ephedrine products. It is the first to do so, while other states restrict their sales in various ways or require special labeling. The incitement to the ban was the death by cardiac arrest last fall of yet another healthy adolescent, 16 year old Sean Riggins. Riggins had taken "yellow jackets" which he had purchased at a gas station.

In news reports of the Illinois ban, various individuals including state officials were quoted as being puzzled and disappointed over the FDA's failure to act despite hundreds of deaths and thousands of cases of injuries and other adverse effects associated with ephedrine products. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the impact of the 1994 DSHEA law which placed "dietary supplements" into the category of "foods" and allowed the FDA to ban them only if it could prove that they were dangerous. Being uncertain as to what it would take to es-

establish such proof and not wishing to be embarrassed by an unsuccessful court action, the FDA has hung back from taking meaningful action against ephedrine products. The result, predictably, has been a steady stream of tragedies such as the Riggins case.

Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters from our readers. Please make your comments brief and related to topics of interest to NTS members. Letters must be signed, and are subject to editing for space considerations.

Letters:

Constructive Criticism

May 24, 2003

Hello,

I myself consider myself to be an open-minded skeptic and I am also a paranormal investigator who has conducted nearly 200 separate investigations into studies on spirits, hauntings, and similar phenomena (with decent results). To say the least your site is disappointing and *very* close-minded.

Although I am not a creationist in the sense you define it, um, what's with all of the attacks against it? I have heard great arguments for Creationism and Evolutionism. It seems that your comments on many of the phenomena in your news letters isn't as much based on facts as it is on bias against certain phenomena in favor of "hard-core" skepticism and atheism/materialism (Stalin's favorite). That is *not* the way to go!

I have found in my studies of free and open inquiry that some phenomena hold weight and others do not, but it seems with the NTS, anything that *does not* fit into your preset paradigms falls into the waste basket because it *sounds* like "quackery". This is hardly what a rational person would and should do. Be *open minded*, don't be another James Randi, who thinks he has qualifications but turns out to be a dud.

Skepticism is about *open inquiry and not closed minds* nor any kind of negative bias against any phenomenon, just an honest examination. Unfortunately, many skeptics just fail to realize this and go up in arms over anything they simply don't agree with.

C. Bohar

An open-minded skeptic

Reply to Christopher Bohar

Christopher,

Thanks for writing us.

1. Regarding your investigations and studies of spirits, hauntings, and such: We are interested in learning what you have done and what you have found out. We are especially interested in your conclusions and how you arrived at them.
2. If we seem "close-minded" it is because we tend to emphasize our conclusions without going to great lengths to detail how we arrived at our conclusions. In fact, we have all arrived at our conclusions after long studies of the relevant issues. I am prepared to give you specific examples if you request them.
3. We attack creationism relentlessly for two reasons: a) It is false (should be a good enough reason by itself). b) People who oppose evolution and especially teaching evolution in the public schools tend to propose teaching creationism instead or in addition to evolution. There is a real problem with the latter, because schools should provide a science education based on the truth rather than something made up by people. Fiction should be taught in the literature classes.
4. You mention our "preset paradigms." If we have a "preset paradigm" it's that reality is separate from imagination. Everything you can imagine is not necessarily real. We have nothing against imaginary things. They make for great stories, enjoyable fiction. We object when people attempt to place these imaginary things and happenings in the real world, sort of like claiming Bugs Bunny is a real person and not just a cartoon character. If I have misinterpreted your reference to our "preset paradigms" please follow up with a short note to straighten me out.
5. Your mention of James Randi is well taken. There is a lot of what Randi does that we admire and try to emulate. James Randi's qualifications speak for themselves. He has never claimed more than he can produce. That's something that cannot be said about the people who have challenged him in the past (and still do).
6. Of course we get up in arms over things with which we do not agree. That's what disagreement is all about. However, the pertinent consideration is why we disagree with something. We tend to disagree with things that are just wrong, not true. We don't go against everything that is not true. There are not enough hours in the day. People keep making stuff up faster than we can read it. As far as the NTS is concerned, there are some topics that just are not in our domain. We just leave them for others to deal with. We deal with matters concerning the

“paranormal” plus certain areas of pseudo science, bizarre hoaxes, and such.

I hope to hear from you soon. Send me a note back and let me know if I have explained anything you did not understand before.

Best regards,

John Blanton

What's New

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Intelligent design? no sign of it in Louisiana's legislature.

A resolution before the Louisiana House Education Committee opposes the use of "textbooks that do not present a balanced view of the various theories relative to the origin of life but rather refer to one theory as a proven fact." Why is it they don't say what they have in mind? It's because the Supreme Court ruled in 1987 that public schools may not include creationism in a science curriculum. Intelligent design is creationism that has evolved protective coloring, and its proponents now resort to this sort of "equal time" proposal. The Louisiana resolution follows a failed attempt earlier in the legislative session to censor textbooks outright if they teach only evolution. The legislature goes home June 23, so we'll know by then if science education in Louisiana will survive to fight another day...stay tuned.

Public Television: "Unlocking the Mystery of Life."

Tuesday, Maryland Public Television aired a high image-quality documentary that pretended to be science. The program, produced by Illustra Media, marks the 50th anniversary of the discovery by Watson and Crick, but the Nobelists won't be pleased. The blurb in the MPT schedule sums it up: "A growing number of scientists now think that DNA and the complexity of life point to purpose and design in nature." The Discovery Institute, which distributes the

documentary, is committed to replacing evolution with intelligent design and is extremely well-funded. This is Phase II, the "publicity" phase of what the Discovery Institute calls the "Wedge Project." The idea is to use "intelligent design" as a wedge to get religion into science education, and evolution out: Phase I was research, Phase III will be legal challenges and a focus on the terrible social implications of evolution. "Unlocking the Mystery of Life" was shown earlier in Michigan and Texas. It may turn up on Public Television near you.

The hydrogen scam: they still haven't found a hydrogen well!

Far from feeling threatened, energy companies welcome the idea of a hydrogen economy. The main commercial source of hydrogen after all is reforming of fossil fuels, a highly polluting process (WN 31 Jan 03). The media, however, which tends to paint hydrogen as the savior of civilization, was in shock this week over a report in Science pointing out that hydrogen leakage could gobble up ozone faster than CFCs, which we banned. Perhaps, but that's not the fundamental problem. We've been through this before. Eight years ago, the House Science Committee reported out the Hydrogen Future Act of 1995. It called for extracting hydrogen from water by electrolysis, and then using the hydrogen as fuel to generate electricity (WN 31 Mar 95). After the laughter died down, the bill was quietly revised. These days, hydrogen is described by the media as "a clean energy source," proving there is no scam so obvious it can't be tried again. The hydrogen solution has even been exported to Europe, where the media gushes over it like their American counterparts. Franco Battaglia at the University of Rome put it this way: "You can buy an apple for one euro. If you really want an apple, you might pay five euros. You could even pay a thousand euros, but you would never pay two apples."

Dietary supplements: Pentagon planners may need ginko biloba.

The New York Times on Monday described the shoddy research done in support of scientific claims made by supplement makers. Under the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act, supplement makers aren't required to prove that their product is either safe or effective, so they don't really need to do any research. But if they make scientific claims for their product, and they all do, they may have to back it up in court. They won't be able to: recently, NIH has begun to subject one magic herb after another to randomized double-blind testing, which one after another have failed miserably (WN 23 Aug 02). Yet, also on Monday, the Washington Post ran a totally credulous story on a project of the Pentagon's Combat Feeding Program to put herbal sub-

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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WITH THANKS TO LEONARD KRISHTALKA, THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, UNIV. OF KANSAS.

stances into lozenges and transdermal patches, to get the healthful properties of the natural remedies flowing in the bloodstream as quickly as possible.

Hydrogen scam? nuclear power, we're told, is a hydrogen well.

Many readers of What's New took umbrage with last week's diatribe called "The Hydrogen Scam." They point out that hydrogen can be produced in ways that do not produce greenhouse gases. Sure, but will it be? 95% of the hydrogen currently produced in the United States comes from steam methane reforming (WN 31 Jan 03), which belches CO₂ and does nothing to promote energy independence. Is a hydrogen economy an idea whose time has come? Maybe, but we need a more open congressional discussion of the administration plan, and less docile coverage by the media.

Rising temperatures: EPA leaves out section on climate-change.

There had been speculation that the Bush administration doctors information to support its policies. It's no longer speculation. An EPA report on the state of the environment was selectively edited. According to the New York Times, a major section describing the risks we face from rising global temperatures was so mangled by the White House that angry EPA staff decided to delete the entire discussion rather than appear to be selectively reporting science. References to reports of environmental effects of human activity were deleted and a reference to a study funded in part by petroleum interests was inserted.

EMF: power lines in Italy can stay where they are.

The Greens had organized a referendum calling for property owners to gain the right to drive power lines off their land, potentially forcing the lines underground at great cost to protect citizens from the awful ravages of EMF exposure. But this week Italians gave it a big yawn, not bothering to vote. Since Italian law requires that more than half of the voting population take part before a referendum can be approved, it all came to nothing.

Power lines and cancer: dead horse in Hamptons flogged again.

Long Island turns out to be just like the rest of world: power lines don't cause cancer there, either. That is the not entirely unexpected result of a large study, to be published next Tuesday. The study began in 1996 and studied the exposure of over 1000 women to magnetic fields; no correlation with breast cancer showed up. Does this result reassure the local activists? Not in the least. "I don't think anyone should be satisfied," the president of a local activist group told the Associated Press. "I think we need to push on."

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

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