UNIVERSITY LOWBROW ASTRONOMERS NEWSLETTER

Early in the morning, one can see a beautiful sight--Mars, Saturn, and Venus, shining together in the sky as a trio of celestial gemstones. This marks the beginning of the famous planetary alignment due to occur on March 10, when all nine planets will be on the same side of the sun. Already all the outer planets lie between 13 and 18 hours right ascension. If one extends this region to 19 hours, the original four asteroids--Ceres, Pallas, Juno, and Vesta--will also be included.

The term "planetary alignment" is not meant to imply that the planets will come together in a straight line. The fact is, they will not even be contained in a single quadrant, but span over 95 degrees. Nevertheless, as many people shrewdly realize, this event will mark the end of the world. In my meager attempts to present this issue objectively, I have listed three arguments for the end of the world, along with three respective refutations:

    1."The tidal forces from the planets will rip the Earth to shreds." As every Astronomy 221 student knows, the tidal influence of the planets is totally insignificant compared to that of the moon.

    2."Various planetary forces will increase the number of sunspots, which will influence the climate of the Earth, which will shift the winds in the atmosphere, which will alter the Earth's rotation rate and trigger major earthquakes." As I understand it, this is the basic idea behind The Jupiter Effect, although I admit I haven't read it. (I don't need to. I know everything). The line of reasoning here seems long and tenuous, and in any case no correlation has been found between sunspot numbers and earthquakes. Besides, an even closer planetary alignment occured in the early 1800's, and not only was the sunspot maximum unusually low, but there were no major earthquakes.

    3."When all the planets get on the same side of the sun, the solar system will get too heavy on one side and fall over." This is the argument that convinced me. And I'm sure it will convince you.

                           -S.D.D.