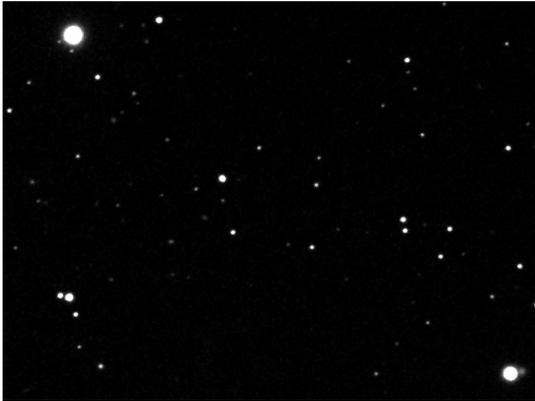


Facts are Facts

Written by James Randi

Wednesday, 26 November 2008 00:00



I'm a rationalist. I depend on evidence, not rumors, and not blind faith. A recent matter has come to my attention, and needs a definitive statement. The International Astronomical Union is the group internationally recognized to have the authority to name astronomical entities – such as moon craters and stars – that other fly-by-night, totally invented, commercially-designed agencies only purport to have. They sell craters and novae to just anyone, but when the IAU assigns a name, that's official!

A few readers have been chortling over the fact that [asteroid 3163 Randi](#) – formerly known as 1981 QM – has now been joined by rocks named in honor of P. Z. Myers, Rebecca Watson, Mike Stackpole, and even JREF president Phil Plait! Now, these folks obviously have their rights to fame, but my enjoyment of this honor is somewhat dimmed by the fact that asteroids are being so easily handed out, left and right...

Mind you, luminaries such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Martin Gardner – in whose collective reflected glory I often revel – have their own assigned asteroids, too, but I searched about for some aspect of this process in which I might find some specific relief, particularly in respect to JREF associates. And there is satisfaction to be had! I assigned my trusty personal aide, Sean McCabe, to look up the data on the pertinent rocks, and he came up with these interesting figures. The names shown are those assigned by the IAU:

PERSON			
Asteroid's new name	Former name	Size	
Myers	153298 Paulmyers	2001 FC122	2.6 km
Watson	153289 Rebeccawatson	2001 FB10	4.3 km
Stackpole	165612 Stackpole	2001 FP86	1.7 km
Plait	165347 Philplait	2000 WG11	1.3 km

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Randi

3163 Randi

1981 QM

12 km

The satisfaction to be had? That my very personal asteroid – at 12 km, note! – is 9 times the size of Phil's, and almost 3 times that of Rebecca's...

So, I've decided that size does matter, after all!

(The origin of this obsession with asteroid size can be found in [this article](#) – just do a search for “delightful.”)