There Goes the Solar System

by Erik_Deckers

Quick, name the nine planets.If you're like most people, you ran through the list with ease: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. You probably even know the mnemonic to help you remember: My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas.But if you're one of those smarmy, self-righteous planet purists, like the scientists of the International Astronomical Union, you scoffed at the notion of nine planets."Pluto?! That's not a proper planet. It's just a big ball of dirt and ice."And if you're one those people, then I have a bone to pick with you.You ruined our solar system!This past Thursday, 2,500 members of the International Astronomical Union took it upon themselves to decide that tiny Pluto was no longer worthy of the mantle of "planet." Instead, it's now a "dwarf planet," which really isn't a planet, so much as a planette. It's a folding metal chair in a galaxy of leather recliners.These self-appointed planetary pundits gathered in Prague, Czech Republic and kick Pluto out of the planet club, citing its small size and lack of a proper orbit."It's big, round, and orbits the sun. What's to argue about?" Pluto supporters argued."That's true," the Pluto haters said, "but so do comets, asteroids, and Star Jones. Does that mean they're planets?"They argued that the current definition of a planet allowed too many of the non-planetary objects into the list."So?" another faction said. "We think a planet should be at least 500 miles in diameter, have a mass of one-12,000th of the Earth, and have enough of its own gravity to be sphere shaped."This bold move would have introduced three more new planets: Ceres, between Earth and Mars; Charon, which is in a planetary tag team with Pluto; and Xena, which lies beyond Pluto.Twelve planets, not nine.My Very Excellent Mother Cheryl Just Served Us Nine Pizzas Chicken Xylophone."The problem is," the Pluto haters said, "this new, looser definition would actually allow other objects in too, which would bring the total to 50."So the knee-jerk naysayers ripped apart the Ceres/Charon/Xena proposal, and rewrote it to create a tighter definition of what a planet was. They said it must have, among other things, cleared the neighborhood around its orbit. In other words, it has to be the dominant body in its area, which means that Star Jones still has a chance at astronomical immortality."Oh, and it can't be called Pluto," said a footnote.It's so obvious to us Pluto pals that the definition was written not only to block out the three potential newcomers, but to also blackball our beloved little planet. Pluto was automatically disqualified by this definition, because its orbit overlaps with Neptune's.So who are these people that have granted themselves dominion over the stars? Who decreed that less than five percent of the world's astronomers could decide the fate of the heavens themselves, redefine our entire solar system, and ruin one of the best mnemonics ever created? I think the International Astronomers Union has just gotten a little taste of power, and they're going to find they like it too much to let go.What will this do to the rest of the galaxy? Do these self-appointed arbiters of planet-ness get to determine whether something is an entire solar system? Will they lop off the right arm of the Milky Way galaxy just because someone prefers left-handers?So what if I formed the International Pluto Supporters Union (IPSU), and voted on whether the International Astronomers Unions are just a bunch of pickle heads? Let's see how they like it. Maybe we'll just have a big conference and get all kinds of media coverage while we argue back and forth over whether they're pickle heads or doody heads. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I don't mean to lash out like that. I'm just so upset that the Littlest Planet has been lost to a bunch of uptight scientists. The four-year-old boy of the solar system -- complete with teddy bear, little overalls, and a cute lisp -- has just been sent to the galactic orphanage by a bunch of hard-hearted greybeards, and my heart is broken.Somebody had better come up with a good reason to let Pluto back into the planetary lineup. Because my very excellent mother just called us Plutonians for dinner, and now there's no pizza.And that makes us really grouchy.

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