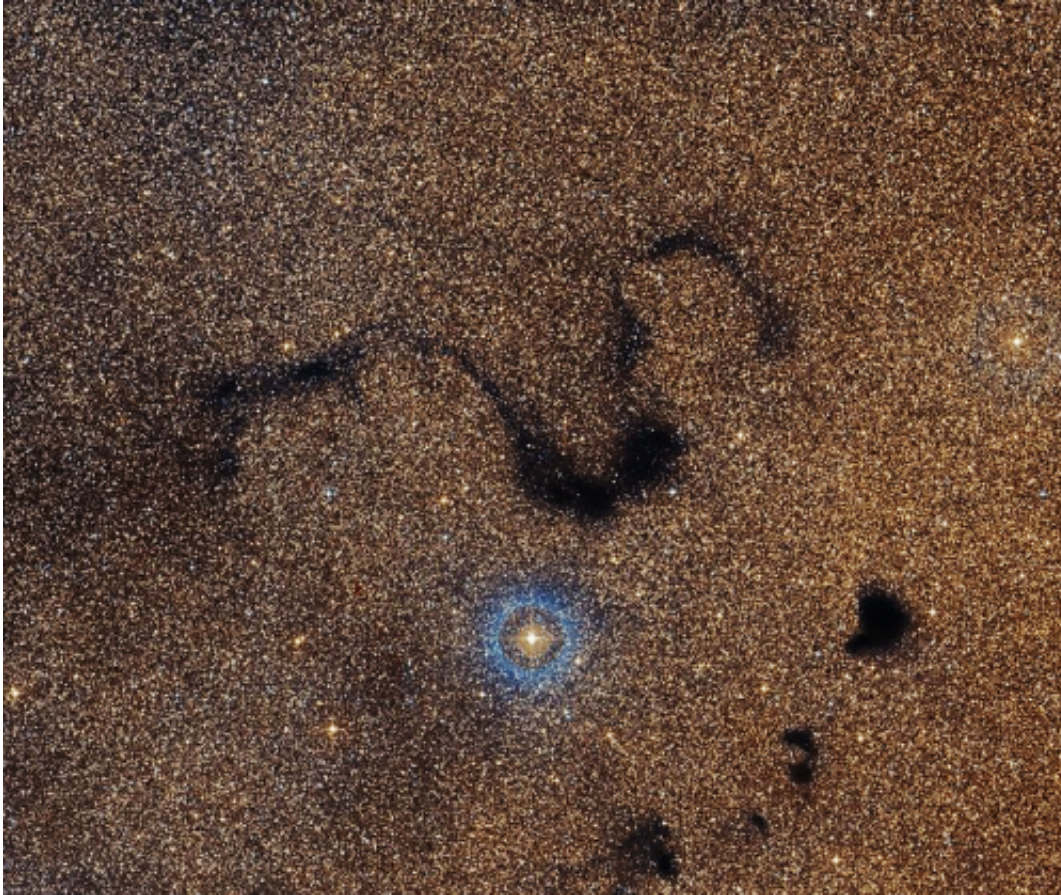


A cosmic snake for Chinese New Year

February 11 2013, by Jason Major



Barnard 72--the “Snake Nebula”. Credit: Wikisky.org

Gong Hey Fat Choy! Today marks the beginning of the Chinese New Year and what better way to celebrate the [Year of the Black Snake](#) than with a look at an enormous shadowy cosmic serpent, the Snake Nebula!

Also known as Barnard 72, the Snake Nebula is a meandering lane of dark dust located about 650 light-years away in the [constellation Ophiuchus](#). Several light-years long, its [opaque dust](#) blocks our view of stars within the central bulge of the galaxy... but also reveals its presence since that region of the sky is literally filled with stars.

The Snake Nebula is part of the larger Dark Horse Nebula.

The bright star seen in the image just below the snake's middle (looks like it may have just had dinner!) is HD 157398, a giant orange star 538 light-years from Earth. Here it shines brightly, but in the sky its visible magnitude is 6.67—just a bit dimmer than what can be seen with the [naked eye](#) under the darkest skies.

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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