

Illusions in the cosmic clouds

October 27 2014, by Whitney Clavin



Credit: ASA/CXC/SAO: X-ray; NASA/JPL-Caltech: Infrared

Pareidolia is the psychological phenomenon where people see

recognizable shapes in clouds, rock formations, or otherwise unrelated objects or data. There are many examples of this phenomenon on Earth and in space.

When an image from NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory of PSR B1509-58—a spinning neutron star surrounded by a cloud of energetic particles —was released in 2009, it quickly gained attention because many saw a hand-like structure in the X-ray emission.

In a new image of the system, X-rays from Chandra in gold are seen along with [infrared data](#) from NASA's Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer (WISE) telescope in red, green and blue. Pareidolia may strike again as some people report seeing a shape of a face in WISE's infrared data. What do you see?

NASA's Nuclear Spectroscopic Telescope Array, or NuSTAR, also took a picture of the neutron star nebula in 2014, using higher-energy X-rays than Chandra.

PSR B1509-58 is about 17,000 light-years from Earth.

Provided by Jet Propulsion Laboratory

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