

## Google is Not Your Friend: An Example

By KT Lowe

Who built the Pyramids of Egypt, the Nazca Lines, Stonehenge and untold numbers of human architectural and technological feats? Humans, of course, unless you're one of the many individuals who subscribe to one of the ancient aliens theories of human development. Although ancient alien contact theories range from human enslavement (the Annunaki) to alien DNA in human beings (a recent article from *The Atlantic*, which also examines a horrifying act of potential desecration of human remains), all of these theories pivot on the idea that ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Akkadians, Celts and others did not possess the intelligence, technological know-how, creativity or capacity to achieve the feats that have been attributed to them. These disturbing theories, as well as many fake news articles, conspiracy theories and other 'alternative news' stories may be classified as pseudoknowledge (Introne, et. al 2017).

Unfortunately, these theories are becoming harder to debunk, because the tools available to us include built-in blinders. For instance, **85% of Google searches are not unique** – most Google queries have already been asked in the past, and Google draws upon these older search results to attempt to predict what you, the searcher, wants to find. However, Google customisation also plays a role, as we will see below. I offer a demonstration of my own attempt to disprove a claim that the home planet of the Annunaki gods has been recently detected.

7:30 AM – After doing the usual wake-up things that I do (many of which involve ensuring the continued affection and well-being of my cat), I go online for the first time that day. On a Facebook friend's page, the first questionable news claim of the day reads 'Meet Nibiru – The Home of the Ancient Annunaki Gods' (<http://www.riseearth.com/2017/07/meet-nibiru-the-home-of-ancient-anunnaki.html?m=1>). I read the article, located on a site called Rise Earth, in its entirety.

7:33 AM – I skim the article a second time looking for authorship, researchers' names, links to sources and basic website information. I note that the article is undated but the page address suggests it was posted online in July 2017. The article is authored by 'Ancient Code', and when I click on the name I'm taken to another site (<https://www.ancient-code.com/meet-nibiru-home-ancient-anunnaki-gods/>), where the article's text (including misspellings) is identical to the Rise Earth version I'm working with. On the original page, I do not see anything that indicates this article was copied with permission of the author.

7:37 AM – Neither article includes links to the sources it cites (Newsweek, AP, 'Caltech researchers', *Astronomical Journal*, even Zecharia Sitchin, who is mentioned liberally throughout), so it's up to me to find these sources. I enter a Google search for 'Newsweek Planet X', one of the main claims in the article.

7:41 AM – The Google search turns up some interesting results. Newsweek published an article on June 23, 2017 (<http://www.newsweek.com/planet-10-lurking-edge-solar-system-628517>, accessed July 27, 2017) which confirms the possibility of a 'Planet Ten' based on irregularities in the Kuiper Belt, a ring of icy celestial objects that surrounds the solar system. This 'Planet Ten' has not been positively identified as of yet. This article in Newsweek makes no mention of Sitchin, Annunaki, Marduk, ancient gods, Enuma Elish or even the orbit of Planet Ten, all of which are mentioned in the article I'm working with. But Newsweek does mention the Caltech researchers and *Astronomical Journal*, and links to both.

7:49 AM – The Caltech article, published in *Astronomical Journal* (<http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.3847/0004-6256/151/2/22;jsessionid=B5568D507489BB2DCDD6751E7F29C6D8.c1.iopscience.cld.iop.org>, accessed 7/27/2017) does not discuss Nibiru, Annunaki gods, gold or any of the major themes of the original article. It serves as source material for the Newsweek article, backing its claims of finding irregularities in Kuiper Belt object orbits and speculating that this is caused by a planet-like mass the size of Mars.

7:56 AM – A second *Astronomical Journal* article, accepted for publication, is not available in full text yet. Its abstract, however, is available (<https://arxiv.org/abs/1704.02444>) and more or less confirms the Caltech findings. Again, no mention of Annunaki, Nibiru, Sitchin, the 2700 year orbit of Planet Ten or any of the other claims in the original article on Rise Earth.

7:57 AM – I go back to the original article's website, riseearth.com, and look for any kind of information that might tell me something about the accountability of the article. The site has no information explaining who runs the site, what the site's core values are, how they verify their information, who writes or edits the site's articles . . . nothing at all, in fact, except a 'Privacy policy' regarding cookies, user data collection and Google ads. I therefore have no idea who is actually involved in the site or the site's underlying values or purpose. I have no assurance that its claims are credible because there is nothing to inform me of their fact-gathering and fact-checking processes. I cannot look up the works of their authors or editors unique to the site, because there are no names listed. (I do note many, many reprinted articles, however, which does not help me with discovering anything about the credibility of the site itself.)

8:05 AM – Since none of the information I found so far links to the Annunaki claims, I do a Google search for 'Annunaki'. And here's where things get weird. I am currently logged into my Google email account, which means that Google is tracking my search and viewing history. My first three pages of Google results yield Wikipedia, two music albums, a DeviatArt page and many, many sites featuring 'alternative' claims, but not a single impartial mainstream scientific source.

8:08 AM – I switch to Google Scholar and use the search term 'Annunaki'. The first result is a 1913 translation of an Assyrian tablet, which is a prayer or invocation of praise to "the son of the god", published in an academic journal of the time. While Marduk and Annunaki are mentioned on that tablet, being common to Sumerian culture, there is little context to understand them further. The next clickable link sends me to a blog post in historicfacts.info, which reads more like a mishmash of actual facts, dubious claims ("the aliens") and advertisements for the blog author's books. Other search results include an aggregate of Wikipedia articles on a site called Revolvly, citations without text or links or **junk science journals**. In fact, beyond that very first search result, I could find almost nothing verifiable or scholarly, which doesn't look so great for Google Scholar.

8:15 AM – Because the Annunaki are associated with Sumerian civilisation, it makes sense to look up 'Annunaki' with the great Sumerian narrative Epic of Gilgamesh. Finally, Google is beginning to return a few more sensible results, but still not as many as I'd like. Some of those results include translations of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The word 'Annunaki' appears in the eighth tablet, in an otherwise highly fragmented section regarding the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh's companion. They also appear on the eleventh tablet, which details the account of a flood very similar to the one found in Biblical accounts. On that tablet, they are carrying torches, but otherwise are not mentioned again. (All translations found at

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/eog/index.htm>; many versions available both online and in print.) I definitely don't have enough information to conclude who the Annunaki were, but they certainly don't behave like aliens intent on enslaving humans. Still, I cannot prove the role of the Annunaki using Google exclusively.

I abandoned the search after 45 minutes because I still could not make a conclusive case denying the claim that the Annunaki gods existed, interfered in human affairs and resided on a planet named Nibiru, which was recently discovered. Despite the tremendous amount of work and time I spent on this task, a true believer in the Annunaki gods could state that my evidence is inconclusive, because I am attempting to prove a negative (the nonexistence of the Annunaki.) In the absence of scholarly or mainstream materials on the Annunaki, Sitchin's (discredited) work fills an uncomfortably large place in pseudoknowledge. With television shows like the History Channel's '**Ancient Aliens**' series retaining popularity, and with the scholarly community generally discounting these viewpoints without serious discussion, these pseudoscientific theories gain even more credence in popular culture, making it even harder to fight back against pseudoscientific claims.

In my search process, however, another part of the problem lies in Google itself. Compare these two screen shots, one taken from a computer in which I was logged into my Google account (Figure 1) and one where I was not logged in (Figure 2).

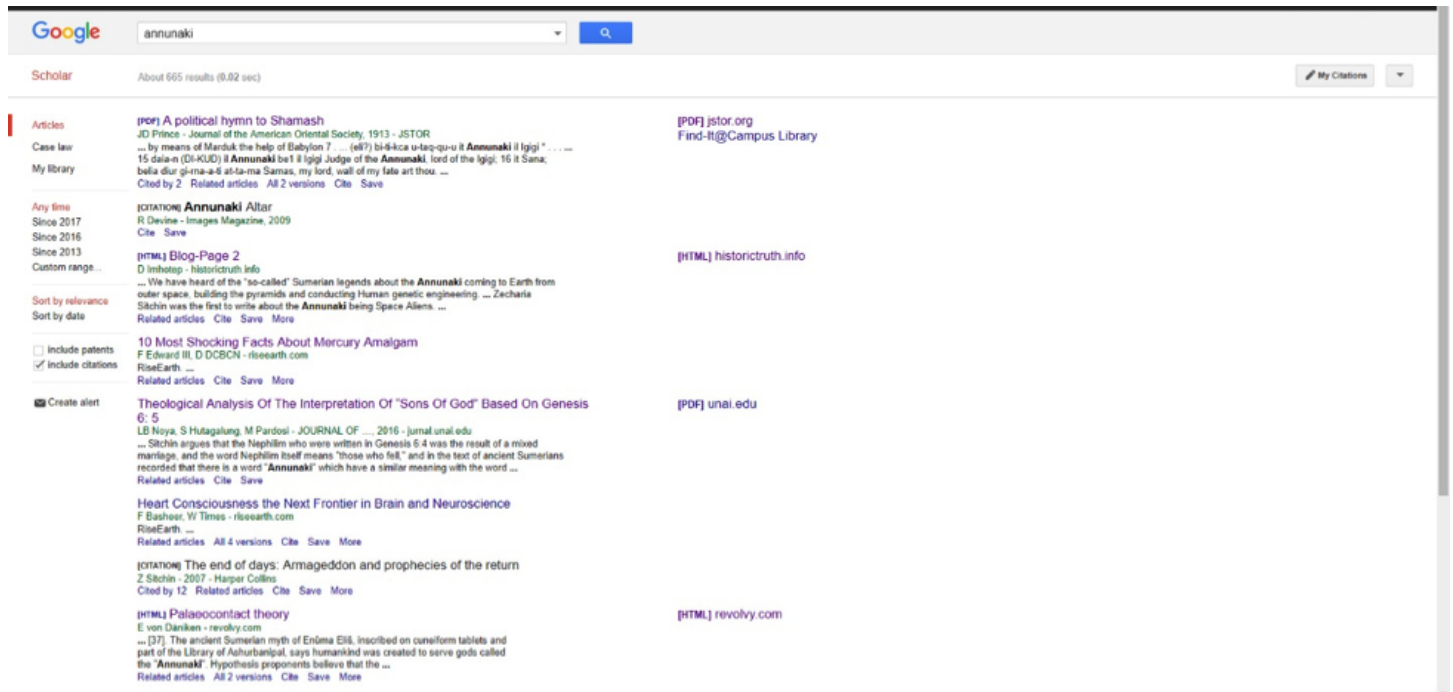


Figure 1: Results on Google Scholar from a computer in which I was logged into my Google account. I had recently opened an article on Annunaki gods on the site riseearth.com.

Google Scholar search results for "annunaki gods". The search bar shows "annunaki gods" and the results page displays several articles with titles, authors, and links to PDFs. The results are sorted by relevance and include filters for time and citation status.

Did you mean: **anunnaki gods**

Articles

Case law [PDF] The Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of Creation [PDF] slbc.org

My library MF Unger - Biblioteca Sacra, 1952 - slbc.org  
... of man, the **Annunaki (gods)** themselves labored for a year, burning brick in order to construct Esagila, the temple-tower of Marduk at Babylon. Then the **gods** gathered at a festive banquet in honor of Marduk. Tablet VII relates how Marduk is finally advanced from the chief **god** of ...  
Cited by 2 Related articles Cite Save More

Any time

Since 2017 [PDF] Burns, D~ ath, IBS 11, January 1989~ [PDF] biblicalstudies.org.uk

Since 2016 JB Burns - biblicalstudies.org.uk

Since 2013 ... In the Baal Epic, these messengers are sent by Baal to the under- world to refuse the tribute that Mot, the **god** of Jeath, has ... The **Annunaki gods** of the Mesopotamian underworld apparently possessed a net which drew people to death: d k -1- . . . d . sapor -a-nun-na- 1 1 an1 1g- u ...  
Related articles All 3 versions Cite Save More

Custom range...

Sort by relevance

Sort by date [PDF] Namtaru and Nergal: Down but Not out: A Reply to Nicolas Wyatt [PDF] jstor.org  
Find-It@Campus Library

include patents

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Create alert

[PDF] After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science. [PDF] asa3online.org

DC Harlow - Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith, 2010 - asa3online.org  
... **Annunaki gods** enjoy privileges of divine rank Yahweh has a private garden with magic trees of life and wisdom Primeval humans (Lullû) created as laborers for **gods** • modeled from clay + rebel **god's** blood • implicitly immortal (no natural death) ...  
Cited by 28 Related articles All 6 versions Cite Save More

[PDF] Gudea and the **Gods**: Intersecting Policy and Prophecy [PDF] byu.edu

A Chapman - Studia Antiqua, 2008 - scholarsarchive.byu.edu  
... of a great temple dedicated to the **god** Ningirsu: Eninnu.24 It begins with a prophetic dream given to Gudea from the **god** Ningirsu, patron ... It is noteworthy that in the first phrase it is written that the **Annunaki gods**, minor deities in the Sumerian pantheon, accompanied Gudea in ...  
Related articles Cite Save

[CITATION] The Arcadian Paintings: Encoded References to an Ancient Global Catastrophe?  
G Osborn - 2006  
Related articles Cite Save

[BOOK] What The Blank Do We Know About the Bible?  
B Johnson - 2011 - books.google.com  
... From the website of Hebrew4Christians, it gives Elohah as the singular form of Elohim meaning

Figure 2: Results on Google Scholar from a computer on which I was not logged in. I had recently searched for 'Annunaki gods' in a Google search.

In my attempts to debunk a claim on ancient aliens, I unwittingly primed Google to search for similar results. As far back as 2013, *Wired Magazine* stated that Google's increasing personalisation of results "insulat(es) ourselves from viewpoints that differ from our own, inadvertently reinforcing our view of the world, and closing our minds to new ideas and experiences" (Martin 2013). Therefore, in researching the truth behind fake news stories, Google specialisation can lead to results based on a person's previous searches and clicks, regardless of whether these are the results the user is actually seeking. Worse, Google's **interface can lend authority to the results it presents**, even when those results are fake. Google becomes an ally of pseudoknowledge, rather than a skillful tool in debunking fake claims.

Last, my own information seeking skills may have failed me. I outline below my general process for debunking a fake news story: Read the article in its entirety, making a note of claims made in the article

- Open a second tab and begin double checking the claims.
- Review the original article's website for information like dates, authorship, tone of language and any information on the website itself regarding its editorial policy. Do the same for the articles used to verify or debunk claims.
- Check articles for bias and purpose of article publication. Note that I never quite got to this step and relied on *Newsweek's* general reputation for accuracy.

These steps take time, sometimes a great deal of time as demonstrated above. Unfortunately, there is no single effective tool for debunking a fake news claim. Educators, librarians and other information professionals can no longer hope for a 'magic bullet' solution to fake news and pseudoknowledge, if ever such a hope existed. However, new tools are in place to help develop information literacy skills. I've highlighted a few that may prove useful.

- **Checkology**, a news game developed by the News Literacy Project, puts students in the editorial chair at a local news outlet. This game reveals the process of collecting, assessing and prioritising news stories in a simulated newsroom, with 'Breaking News' and other features which enhance both game playability and news literacy. Educators and students will need to create accounts to use the game, which is online-based and free.
- **Startpage.com** is an anonymous Google-based search engine. Unlike a Google Incognito search, Startpage.com does not collect user data, which means search results cannot be tailored to the user's Google preferences. Results tend to be more accurate as a result. (See Figure 3 for Startpage.com Google results for 'Annunaki gods'.)

startpage

annunaki gods

Web Images Videos Advanced Bookmark

Any time  
Past 24 hours  
Past week  
Past month  
Past year

+ Add to Chrome  
🏠 Set as Home

Did you mean: **anunnaki gods**

Ads by Google related to: annunaki gods  
Annanaki - Official Kindle Store - amazon.com  
www.amazon.com/kindle-store/books  
Find Annanaki in Spirituality Books on Amazon.  
★★★★★ rating for amazon.com

**Anunnaki - Wikipedia**  
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anunnaki Proxy Highlight  
The Anunnaki are a group of deities that appear in the mythological traditions of the ancient ... In the Old Babylonian period, the Anunnaki were the gods of the Underworld, set in contrast with the Igigi, who had, by that time, become heavenly ...

**The Ancient Aliens - Annunaki - Gods of Sumeria**  
www.theancientaliens.com/gods-of-sumeria Proxy Highlight  
The Annunaki (Anuna in original Sumerian text) gods were numerous. According to Sumerian text, they numbered 600 in population. It was written that 300 were ...

**Sumerian Gods and Goddesses - Anunnaki - Crystalinks**  
www.crystalinks.com/sumergods.html Proxy Highlight  
In Sumerian Mythology the Anunnaki were a pantheon of good and evil gods and goddesses (duality) who came to Earth to create the human race. According to ...

**Who are the Anunnaki? | What is the Planet Nibiru? - Truth Be Known**  
www.truthbeknown.com/anunnaki.htm Proxy Highlight  
It appears that the Anunnaki thesis has now led to the conclusion that, while the Bible is not infallible, its god Yahweh is valid and its various characters are the ...

**Those Of Royal Blood | Annunaki Aliens History**  
www.annunaki.org Proxy Highlight  
The Annunaki "Those Of Royal Blood" are believed to be immortal gods that inhabited the earth during the ancient sumerian time in mesopotamia.

**Anunnaki | Alien Species | FANDOM powered by Wikia**  
aliens.wikia.com/wiki/Anunnaki Proxy Highlight  
The Annunaki deities were worshipped by the Ancient Sumerians. The Sumerians

**Anunnaki**  
Wikimedia list article

The Anunnaki (also transcribed as: Anunaki, Anunna, Anunnaku, Ananaki and other variations) are a group of deities in ancient Mesopotamian cultures (e.g. Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and... More

Figure 3: Results on 'Anunnaki gods' using a Startpage.com search. Results are mixed in terms of accuracy but less biased in favor of pseudoknowledge than a Google search which preserved previous preferences.

- Social media forums are also developing fake news detection devices. FactCheck.org has developed a set of instructions on reporting fake news stories on Facebook. Instagram so far seems to be behind the fake news detection curve, but Twitter is in the process of building fake news detectors.
- Project Look Sharp is an initiative developed by Ithaca College to develop media literacy tools for educators. As part of their work, they have published The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy and host numerous workshops on the subject of news and media for K-12 audiences.

In light of these discouraging results from my own failures as a fake news debunker, I believe **the best hope in the fight against fake news remains solid information literacy**. We as librarians rarely find ourselves taken in by false claims online, but our insight is based on consistent practice and exposure to a plethora of news sources. Still, even the most seasoned of us may not immediately recognise a fake journal owing to their **impersonation techniques** and **sheer numbers**. Still, strong information literacy skills remain our best option for ensuring better information spread in the future. Factcheckers are wonderful tools, but they **cannot factcheck in real time**. By the time they have managed to examine an article fully, the original fake article has spread. Worse, they have been **the targets of fake news sites** themselves. Therefore, strong information literacy skills remains the gold standard for any fact checking endeavor, and has become increasingly important for not only students, but anyone who ingests information.

***KT Lowe** is the Coordinator of Library Instruction and Service Learning at Indiana University East. She earned a BA in Asian Studies, a MSI in Information Science and a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies, all from the University of Michigan. Her Fake News LibGuide, the first created on the topic of fake news, has been viewed over 75,000 times throughout the world and was cited by both the American Library Association and PBS NewsHour. In addition to her public outreach on fake news, she also conducts workshops and school programming on local history, forensic science and the history of chocolate.*