

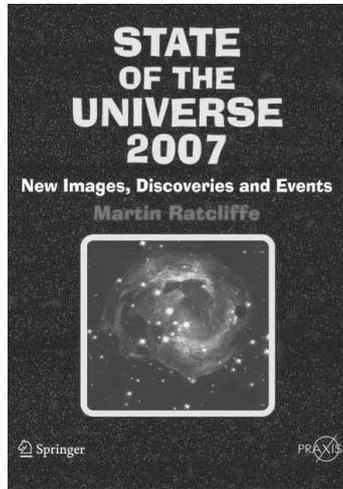


State of the Universe 2007: New images, discoveries and events

by Martin Ratcliffe

Springer/Praxis, 2007. ISBN 0-387-34178-1. Pp xiii + 187, £15.50 (hbk).

As you flick through *State of the Universe* the eye-catching design hits you with its kaleidoscope of colour. There are dozens of large, vivid illustrations. Even the pages are tinted, each section or article in its own rainbow shade with jazzy, coordinated headings. The inspiration behind it, we are told, was an enthusiasm the publisher shares with writer and educator Martin Ratcliffe for traditional children's annuals with their strip-cartoons, short stories and puzzles. *State of the Universe* stops short of strip-picture stories, but it does feature



Bunny the feline astronomer (a Russian blue, otherwise known as AstroKat), who stars in a series of quirky cartoons. And we're told that this volume is the first of an annual series, attempting 'to capture some of the flavor of the dynamic, fast-paced, and sometimes turbulent flood of astronomical information about our Universe'.

The first 70 pages contain 100 edited press notices covering the period April 2005 to March 2006 in chronological order. Each notice has at the end one or more URLs for web pages where more information can be found. The latter part of the book consists of ten contributed feature articles by astronomers and science writers. Topics include Supernova 1987A twenty years on, what has been achieved with the Hubble Space Telescope and the Spitzer Space Telescope, gravitational

waves and gamma-ray bursts. To wrap up, there are useful tables of information about professional astronomical observatories, both ground-based and orbiting, together with a 13-page listing of extrasolar planets.

The standard of writing and editing throughout is high but there are some shortcomings. There is no index, nor a list of the titles

or subjects of the hundred press notices. To use the press notices for reference (a suggestion made in the preface), you would have to read through them all to discover whether what you are looking for is there. Some readers may find the formulaic style of press notices rather tedious when there are 100 one after an-

other. Curiously, the Universe of this book does not include the solar system (apart from two or three brief references in the contributed articles). No press notice included is about the Sun or the solar system though the back cover claims that the book 'gives the latest news and information about all areas of astronomy and astrophysics'.

State of the Universe 2007 contains an interesting selection of astronomical material and there's nothing too technical for anyone with a basic knowledge of astronomy. However, I suspect it was put together with a view to publication in late 2006 rather than in 2007. Offered as a topical selection of 'hot' news, some of the stories are feeling distinctly 'cold' up to two years on. If this mix of press notices, pictures and articles appeals, I recommend buying and reading it without delay.

Jacqueline Mitton

Dr Jacqueline Mitton is the author of over 20 astronomy books and a former editor of this Journal. In her time as Press Officer of the Royal Astronomical Society, she wrote hundreds of press notices.

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