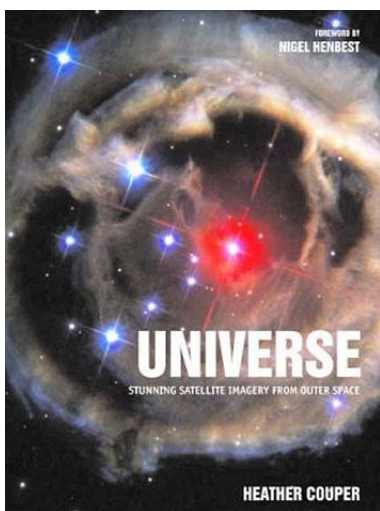




## Universe: stunning satellite imagery from outer space

by Heather Couper, foreword by Nigel Henbest

Cassell Illustrated, 2007. ISBN 978-1-84403-437-6. Pp 287, 27×34cm, £30 (hbk).



There are many coffee table astronomy books on the market so the arrival of yet another naturally prompts the questions: who is this book aimed at and what does it have to offer them? The author provides a clue in her introduction when she says 'Welcome to the Art Gallery of the Universe'.

My first impression of the book was positive. Heather Couper's introduction conveys her interest in and love of astronomy. She talks about the early observing experiences which changed her life, her father's interest and encouragement and her mother's help with writing and explaining things in a poetic way. She also tells us about the history of the telescope and photography.

The foreword by Nigel Henbest suggests that the beauty of astronomy should be enjoyed in the same way we look at scenery on earth, mentioning how a volcanic eruption colours the sky at sunset. The wonders of aurora, eclipses of the moon and the sun, astronauts' views of the earth, unmanned space craft and the Hubble Space Telescope have all given us an opportunity for a different vision of the Universe.

This gives an idea what the book hopes to achieve, which I think is to make us aware of what we can see even if we have no scientific knowledge. The beauty is there for everyone to enjoy. Through advances in technology, telescopes and photography, we now have the potential to open a book and see the wonders of the Universe. This book richly delivers on that potential.

The book is divided into ten sections covering the Sun, Moon, planets, birth and death of stars, galaxies through to black holes and the big bang. Each section begins with a clear and concise description of the topic and this is followed by a well-chosen selection of stunning photographs. The text accompanying each image gives enough information to explain what we are seeing without going into too much detail. The section on planets chooses to avoid the current controversy about how Pluto should be classified. The section on comets covers the ones that have made headlines recently so their names should be familiar to readers. 'Starbirth' introduces the underlying science in an easy to understand way. Stardeath, Black Holes, Quasars and the Big Bang finish the story.

Having this book on your coffee table is likely to arouse an interest in astronomy at

all levels. The photographs range from the astronomy we can see by just looking outside to views of the distant universe only visible through telescopes, and they have enough visual interest to stimulate even the casual reader. The accompanying text provides enough information to catch readers' interest without overloading them. This would be a good book to give someone to encourage their interest in astronomy, as it provides an accessible introduction coupled with lots of visual stimulation. This is Heather Couper at her best: popularising astronomy in an interesting, well written way.

### Ann Davies

*Ann Davies is a member of Council and is sales and promotions coordinator for the BAA. Twenty-six years ago she was a founder member of the Newbury Astronomical Society.*

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