

Pluto – sentinel of the outer solar system

by **Barrie W. Jones**

Cambridge University Press, 2010.
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In 2015, NASA's *New Horizons* space probe will fly by Pluto and its satellite Charon, when, if all goes to plan, the first close-up images of this distant world will be splashed across the media, and many of the questions the author poses in this fine book will be answered. In the meantime, Barrie Jones has provided a service to us all in collating much diverse material, and skilfully writing an authoritative book appealing not only to astronomers but also to a more general readership.

That the author is a highly competent lecturer based at the Open University comes across in all that he has written. He marshalls the facts and carefully leads the reader by the hand through various topics by explaining the different concepts from start to finish, without assuming any prior knowledge. Boxed text is used to present more advanced information, and a comprehensive glossary of further reading and other resources is provided for those wishing to delve deeper into the subject.

The book includes a description of the solar system, putting Pluto into its place amongst the Sun's retinue, a concise and fascinating account of the discover-

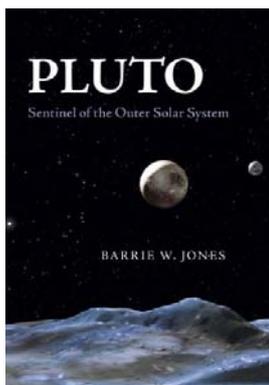
ies of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, and a chronological reckoning of the rise in our understanding of the physical nature of Pluto and its satellites, touching on the topics of trans-Neptunian objects and the Edgeworth–Kuiper belt. The author tackles the question of whether Pluto is a 'planet', recounting the events leading up to, and the reasoning behind, the 2006 IAU resolution to change its status to that of a 'dwarf planet'. The main text finishes with a preview of the *New Horizons* mission and a speculation on what it would be like to visit this far-flung, icy world.

This is another quality book from the CUP stable. I found the text to be essentially error-free and grammatically impeccable, a rare commodity these days. I spotted two minor errors – a typo in the Acknowledgments section where Marc Buie's name is mis-spelt, and the mention of Bruno Sicardy's name (on p.102 and in the Index) where he is ascribed the forename Bernard.

All in all an excellent book which includes some Figures reproduced in colour and archive-quality paper – thoroughly recommended to all those wishing to read up about Pluto ahead of the *New Horizons* encounter with the 'planet'.

Richard Miles

A physical chemist by profession, Richard is now retired from the petrochemical industry and observes small solar system bodies by night, and also by day with the help of robotic telescopes. He is Director of the BAA's Asteroids & Remote Planets Section.



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