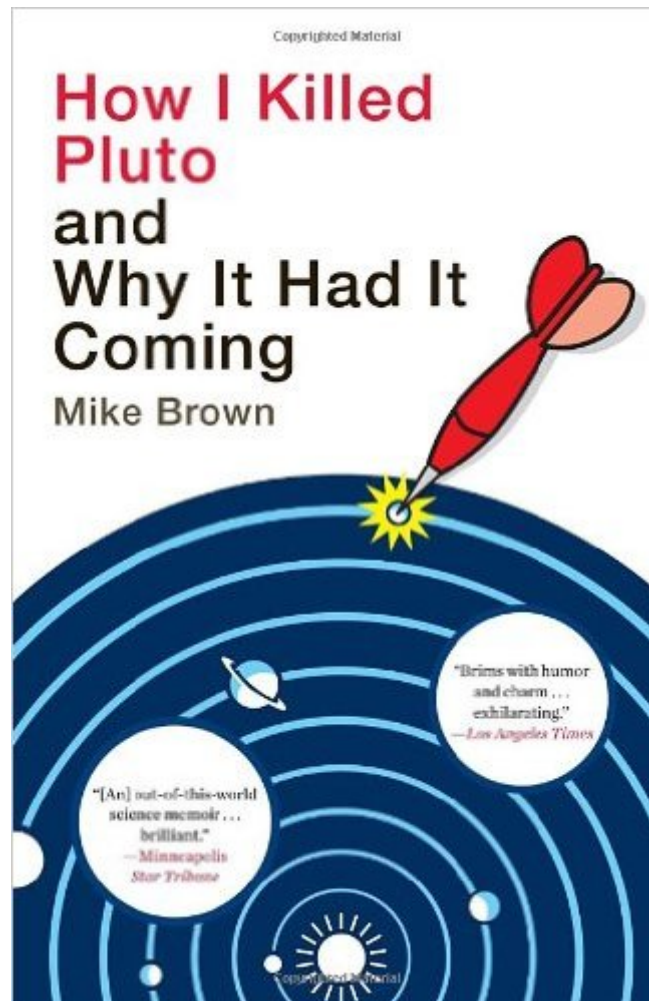


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How I Killed Pluto And Why It Had It Coming



Synopsis

The solar system most of us grew up with included nine planets, with Mercury closest to the sun and Pluto at the outer edge. Then, in 2005, astronomer Mike Brown made the discovery of a lifetime: a tenth planet, Eris, slightly bigger than Pluto. But instead of adding one more planet to our solar system, Brown's find ignited a firestorm of controversy that culminated in the demotion of Pluto from real planet to the newly coined category of "dwarf planet." Suddenly Brown was receiving hate mail from schoolchildren and being bombarded by TV reporters—all because of the discovery he had spent years searching for and a lifetime dreaming about. A heartfelt and personal journey filled with both humor and drama, *How I Killed Pluto and Why It Had It Coming* is the book for anyone, young or old, who has ever imagined exploring the universe—and who among us hasn't?

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Customer Reviews

Thanks to Mike Brown, two of my childhood illusions have been shattered: Pluto is no longer a planet, and Astronomy isn't a riveting, exciting science as I thought it would be. Mike Brown is a CalTech astronomer who has been looking for objects past Pluto and found over a dozen of them. That's where the problem lies. Most of objects are half the size of Pluto, and Eris is about 25% bigger than Pluto. So it stands to reason that either Eris is our new 10th planet in the solar system, or since it behaves a bit strangely like Pluto, then Pluto isn't a planet (since it moves in an irregular orbit, etc.) The logic makes sense, and Dr. Brown explains it from both sides and fully understands

that growing up, all of us learned that Pluto was a planet, and that changing that would result in uproar. He's fair and balanced in his logic and reasoning and explains it very well. Dr. Brown doesn't romance the life of the astronomer: they work odd hours, have to deal with weather, the moon, long hours poured over maps and plates to determine if objects move or not. They're obsessive creatures with understanding spouses (Dr. Brown mentions his spouse a lot, who sounds like a great person and adds "Astronomy wives" to the long list of suffering spouses who deal with a spouse with a crazy profession.) There's an interesting background to what it means to actually discover something. I didn't know that there was a proper naming nomenclature behind finding objects. Giving Eris the original name of Xena (after the "Warrior Princess" TV show) led to vigorous discussion. If it was a Kuiper belt object, then it should be named after a creation deity.

Who will be interested in this book? Astronomy buffs, of course, science historians, every last geek alive, people who enjoy really good writing, and (surprisingly) also anxious new parents. By coincidence, I delivered this book just as I was re-visiting perhaps the best scientific discovery book ever written: *The Double Helix*, so I had the Gold Standard fresh in my mind as I dove into this one. Mike Brown is a good writer. There are three separate stories in here. There's the discovery of the "tenth planet" and the eventual (correct) decision to instead demote Pluto, which is a fascinating tale. Then, just when you think the fat lady is about to sing, outrageous cheating, lies, international intrigue, and clever 21st Century detective work appear out of nowhere. And then there's what was going on in the author's life at the time, the whole back-story of how he got into astronomy, and how his discoveries affected him and his new family. All of that is an integral part of the story, and besides, you might be as amused as I was that this very bright man, quite capable of discovering planets and accurately describing how his wife and he came together, yet still somehow believes that HE was the one doing the courting. In case you worry that the whole thing might be too touchy-feely, let's head down into the astronomy for a moment. I was delighted that the storied but almost-forgotten wide-field Schmidt telescope at Palomar (the source of the first and still-relevant star map of the Northern Hemisphere) became the workhorse of the whole endeavour.

How I Killed Pluto and Why It Had It Coming / 978-0385531085 Like many people, I watched with interest the 2006 showdown that culminated in the announcement that Pluto was no longer a "planet". I'd been taught since childhood that Pluto was a planet, and in some ways it seemed a little sad for it to be stripped of its status. Ultimately, however, the decision seemed reasonable given what very little I knew of the situation. The year came and went, Pluto was demoted to "dwarf

planet" (a category it would share with several other small bodies), and life went on. When this book came available on Vine, I was quick to snatch it up because I was sure the in-depth story would be interesting, but if you had told me at the time that I would stay up until the wee hours of the morning madly turning pages as fast as I could read, then I would have been skeptical to say the least. "How I Killed Pluto" is a truly delightful read, and a wonderful page-turner. Professor of planetary astronomy and author Mike Brown writes in a distinctly clear and clever manner, and the science on display here is astonishingly easy to follow - if Dr. Brown teaches as clearly as he writes, then it must be a delight to be one of his students. The book follows Brown's discoveries of several bodies in our solar system, including the "tenth planet" (for a very short time, at least!) Eris, as well as his increasingly firm opinion that the objects he is discovering are not truly planets - and, by extension, neither can be Pluto. It's surprising to see someone with so much to gain from a looser planetary definition (as Eris' discoverer, Brown would be the only living human being to discover a planet!

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