



The Planets

Dava Sobel

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With her bestsellers *Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel introduced readers to her rare gift for weaving complex scientific concepts into a compelling narrative. Now Sobel brings her full talents to bear on what is perhaps her most ambitious topic to date—the planets of our solar system. Sobel explores the origins and oddities of the planets through the lens of popular culture, from astrology, mythology, and science fiction to art, music, poetry, biography, and history. Written in her characteristically graceful prose, *The Planets* is a stunningly original celebration of our solar system and offers a distinctive view of our place in the universe.

* A *New York Times* extended bestseller

* A Featured Alternate of the Book-of-the-Month Club, History Book Club, Scientific American Book Club, and Natural Science Book Club

* Includes 11 full-color illustrations by artist Lynette R. Cook BACKCOVER: "[*The Planets*] lets us fall in love with the heavens all over again."

-*The New York Times Book Review*

"Playful . . . lyrical . . . a guided tour so imaginative that we forget we're being educated as we're being entertained."

-*Newsweek*

"[Sobel] has outdone her extraordinary talent for keeping readers enthralled. . . . *Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter* were exciting enough, but *The Planets* has a charm of its own A splendid and enticing book."

-*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A sublime journey. [Sobel's] writing . . . is as bright as the sun and its thinking as star-studded as the cosmos."

-*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"An incantatory serenade to the Solar System. Grade A-"

-*Entertainment Weekly*

"Like Sobel's [*Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter*] . . . [*The Planets*] combines masterful storytelling with clear, engaging explanations of the essential scientific facts."

-*Physics World*

The Planets Details

Date : Published October 31st 2006 by Penguin Books (first published 2005)

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Author : Dava Sobel

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From Reader Review The Planets for online ebook

Cara says

If you open this book expecting science, you will be sorely disappointed, as I was. All the same, it's not fair to rate a book low just because it wasn't what I expected, and that's not why I gave "The Planets" only two stars (and I think I'm being quite generous). The reason is, "The Planets" isn't really about anything at all. It's a tiny part personal history - the author's relationship with the planets, tiny part social and cultural history - the discovery of and significance of the planets in a cultural sense, tiny part science, and tiny part creative writing (there's a vignette from the first-person perspective of a Mars rock). The problem is all these tiny parts don't add up to one coherent whole. Whether you're looking for science, history, culture, or whatever else, you'll be left feeling disappointed and unfulfilled. I give this book two stars instead of just one because I do like Dava Sobel's writing style - it's eloquent and fun, though not by itself able to save this book.

Michael says

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Bionic Jean says

What is so unusual and engaging about this book is that it incorporates science, myth, history, story-telling, culture and poetry.

Dava Sobel's credentials for writing Science, and particularly Astronomy, books are exemplary. It is surprising to find that she chooses to include other aspects rather than having a fixed dry approach to the

subject. She will be relaying facts and figures from Space probes or the Hubble space telescope - then will veer off into beliefs or poetry of the Ancient Greeks.

I can recognise that this is a ground-breaking book. If you are looking for a primer on the planets however, this is not for you. There IS a chapter devoted to each planet, but this is misleading. After reading it you may not really retain any new "facts and figures". But you may feel about each planet in a different way, and have a different breadth of understanding.

Objectively it probably deserves a better star rating. But sadly I personally found it a bit of a slog.

Andrew says

Confession time: I originally perused this book because the cover is beautiful.

As a child, I was fascinated with astronomy. As a college Freshman, I took an astronomy course and dropped out after a few weeks. Perhaps now I would be able to grasp the difficult mathematics required for even elementary-level space science. Perhaps. But I think I'm better off with a text like *The Planets*, which dives into the fascinating history (and indeed much of the science) of our solar system with a sense of whimsy and poetry.

Unlike, apparently, some who have written reviews of this book, I read a few pages before buying it. I do that regardless of topic or genre. To begin reading something is an investment of my time and energy. I've read criticisms of the approach used here, and I don't understand how that approach wasn't apparent from the beginning. I guess this isn't my problem, but I feel a bit sad to read negative reviews by people who really are not within the intended audience here. This is beginning-level stuff, surely, for a general readership with an interest in, not an expertise with, the material.

I know I haven't retained a lot of the specifics Dava Sobel has shared here, but that's not to say I haven't learned a lot. I also have a strong appreciation for how Sobel shaped each chapter, each treatment of individual bodies of the solar system. I'm happy to have read it.

<http://darkmagnet.blogspot.com/>

Adrian White says

Fascinating because of its subject but I wasn't totally convinced by Dava Sobel's approach: I thought it worked better for some chapters than for others. What it did do well for a simple lad such as myself was to instill a sense of wonder at the many varied worlds out there - in our planetary system and beyond.

Pamela Kinney says

I devoured this book, and was very sad when it ended. Her format of comparing and contrasting the science of astronomy (modern, ancient, and everything in between) and folklore of astrology was enthralling. I did not give it five stars because I kept feeling like I wanted more, just a bit more, for each planet. But I loved

the book, and it led me to search out her other works. I have read each of her books since, except "A More Perfect Heaven." Still trying to get to it. I definitely recommend this book, though it was a bit more of a "light" read than I wanted.

Joshua says

A beautiful reminder that the pretty orbs we memorized in grade school are more than that. They're actual alien worlds rich with a chemical character and harmony that mirrors our connection to them. Dave Sobel writes poetry and facts about the Solar System, and reminds her reader to look up to the stars with wonder and inspiration.

Nikki says

I think I expected this to be more scientific than it turned out to be, which may be a common problem judging from other reviews. It's actually more of a historical glance at the way humanity has envisioned the galaxy, and the way our knowledge has grown over the millennia. It's a lot literary, with bits of science and mythology thrown in. Some parts of it were lovely for that, though I wasn't sure about the emphasis on linking the Old Testament Genesis story with the scientific facts of creation. It seems likely to alienate a lot of readers, even if it sounds pretty.

Of course, we mustn't forget that this is also quite behind the times now: published in 2007ish, shortly after the demotion of Pluto, it has nothing to say about more recent discoveries about the moons of the outer planets, or Curiosity, or anything like that. It's quite accessible, but not up to date, which is a pity.

Sometimes the literary interludes really got on my nerves, with Sobel putting words into people's mouths and anthropomorphizing inanimate objects. I like literary tricks like that as much as the next person, but it just seems ridiculous when they're giving words and complex thought to a meteorite...

aPril does feral sometimes says

This is an asinine science book. What it is, actually, is a group of lyrical essays rhapsodizing in poetic, easy to understand, prose mixing science fact and selected bits of science history and lots of subjective ecstasy. In other words, a coffee table book for readers of Vogue Magazine, except that it needs more pictures and its small paperback size fits most purses. Perfect for the literary magazine reader who has difficulty with science subjects, or those readers of a poetic and romantic nature. If you are at all Asperger's, you will be tossing this into the nearest bin.

Some quotes from the book: "The Book of Genesis tells how the dust of the ground, molded and exalted by the breath of life, became the first man. The ubiquitous dust of the early Solar System-flecks of carbon, specks of silicon, molecules of ammonia, crystals of ice-united bit by bit into "planetesimals," which were the seeds, or first stages, of planets." and so on. Included are entire poems written about the planets. Another excerpt: "Call me "It," or call me "Allan Hills 84001" my given name-even "Thing from Mars" will suit. Although I am only a rock and cannot answer, allow me this conceit of conscious identity for the space of these few pages, that I may speak for Mars, whence I traveled via chance and the laws of physics." Or: "The

hot soup still counts as "ice" in the parlance of planetary science, however, like the 'hot ice and wondrous strange snow' of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Or: "All of the above, probably, all rendered the more extraordinary for having traveled to her across 240,000 miles of interplanetary space, in the belly of a rocket ship, and hand-delivered as the love token of a handsome man. Lucky, lucky Carolyn."

Self-conscious, an MFA's graduate's dream of successful writing (which I think it is, by the way-A plus), nonetheless I found myself alternately bent over in mirth and disgust. This book has too much saccharine for me and not enough sugar.

Lisa says

Should have been published with large color pictures as a coffee table book. I'm not sure this should be shelved with the science books- while it does include some facts about the planets, it's more a literary effort. As it is, the individual chapters feel wholly disconnected from each other, written in a wide variety of styles, and some with entirely extraneous information, such as the friend of the author's who ate moon dust after being given it as a present by a boyfriend. I honestly thought that would be the strangest bit of the book, but that was before I reached the chapter where the author suddenly decided to write in the first person as a bit of Martian rock or the one where a letter written by Caroline Herschel was reproduced in its entirety . (That chapter was very odd. Did the author have a word quota she had to make and was short on? The chapter started with a quote from Mitchell, switched to the letter from Herschel to Mitchell, and then concluded with a minimal amount of text by the author.) All in all, a disappointment.

Chelsea says

Dava Sobel manages beautifully and engagingly to bring these heavenly bodies as close as one's own backyard. With eloquent descriptions of their compositions, the reader is transported throughout the solar system from the scorching toxic surface of Venus to the seas of liquid metallic hydrogen underneath Jupiter's crushing atmosphere and beyond.

The chapters are organized by planet and they include discussions on history, mythology, geology, and the scientific community that has discovered and explored the planets and their neighboring objects. Her prose is lyrical and her passion for science and space apparent. The book is written to be accessible to the non-science major and manages this well, if not flawlessly. The true science buff will definitely want for more, but the intention behind this book seems to be to whet the appetite, not gorge the mind on facts.

Some chapters are more successful than others (Venus and Jupiter being stand-outs while Mars and Neptune are much weaker), but overall, this book is beautifully written and would be a good introduction to non-fiction for the staunch pretty prose reader.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

Audio #124

Jim says

An interesting tour of the solar system with not only factual information, but some history of the myths & beliefs that surround each one. I found her narration of the discovery of Pluto particularly good. She really weaves the story of Lowell & Tombaugh together well & then takes us down its road of demotion.

Kerrie says

I tried, but couldn't make it through the first CD. I know Sobel is a science writer (so sez the back of the audiobook) and I really enjoyed *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of his Time*, but I didn't quite care for the tone of the book, where meteorites were described as "avenging angels" and Earth's inhabitants were referred to as "sons of Adam and Noah." I'm not quite sure why she chose a biblical way of presenting scientific information, but I didn't care for it, and I lost confidence in her authority right away. From the other reviews here, I definitely would have bailed once she started in on the astrology of the planets (and suggesting that charts should have been done on the NASA probes before their missions?). **For real???** And this person writes about science? I guess if I want to read an engaging book about our cosmos, I'll lean more toward Neil DeGrasse Tyson.

Pat says

The Planets is an interesting book, but one that is not for everyone. If you are looking for highly technical or academic treatment of planetary science, look elsewhere. If you want to get an overview of the planets in our solar system, this book does that. Mostly this book reminded me of information I used to know but had forgotten. There were a few new facts from more recent discoveries that I found interesting.

The writing style is clear and very readable, not weighed down with a technical jargon or mathematics. The text is sprinkled with poetry (which I skipped) and personal reflections. I expect these were intended to make the subject more accessible or relatable. I found them distracting and at times condescending.

There are a number of color illustrations scattered throughout the text. While these are pleasing to look at, I did not think they added anything.

I received this book from a Goodreads giveaway.
