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Planetfall: New Solar System Visions



Synopsis

Thanks to the photographic output of a small squadron of interplanetary spacecraft, we have awakened to the beauty and splendor of the solar system. Since Michael Benson's masterful book *Beyond: Visions of the Interplanetary Probes*, new, more powerful cameras in probes with greatly improved maneuverability have traversed the wheeling satellites of Jupiter; roamed the boulder-strewn red deserts of Mars; studied Saturn's immaculate rings; and shown us our own ravishing Earth, a blue-white orb with a disturbingly thin atmosphere, as it plunges deeper into ecological crisis. These new images are the subject of Benson's *Planetfall*, a truly revelatory book that uses its large page size to reproduce the greatest achievements in contemporary planetary photography as never before. Praise for *Planetfall*: "All retrospectives, art and otherwise, should shock us awake the way this one does . . . *Planetfall* is a book of science through and through, but it also deepens our sense of the miracle and the mystery of the universe, of our eye-blink lives." • "The New York Times" "This is the way I like to tour the solar system. Find a chair. Sit. Turn some pages. Gaze. Wonder." • "NPR.com" "Beautiful interplanetary images." • "MSNBC.com" "Beautiful visions of what's out there." • "The Huffington Post" "To encounter a Benson landscape is to be in awe of not only how he sees the universe, but also the ways in which he composes the never-ending celestial ballet." • "Time.com"

Book Information

Hardcover: 204 pages

Publisher: Harry N. Abrams (October 1, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1419704222

ISBN-13: 978-1419704222

Product Dimensions: 15 x 1 x 12 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Michael Benson's new photo-essay book about our Solar System is of the same high quality as his

two previous masterworks, "Beyond" and "Far Out." His previous work, "Far Out," covered the enormous size and timescape of the entire universe, as it is perceived by us. This time, in "Planetfall," Benson returns home to our own cosmic backyard. He reveals the Solar System to us using the latest images from the most recent generation of planetary explorers, most notably the Cassini Spacecraft's stunning images of Jupiter and Saturn. There are also magnificent images of the Sun (which are the best I have ever seen published in any book), of Mars, and of our own planet Earth and its moon, taken from other space probes. This book concentrates on those newer, deep-space images of the planets (and some of their moons) that many Americans may not have seen yet in other books, and also adds some of the best images from the surface of Mars taken recently by the Spirit and Opportunity rovers. He skips Mercury and Venus, but that did not bother me because there is not much to see there, and this left more room for the stunning images of Jupiter and Saturn, Mars, and the Earth, which are the cornerstone of the book. The book is light on text and heavy on imagery, and I found it just the right balance for this type of "coffee table book." Benson allows us to see our Solar System as we would if we were space voyagers on an interstellar mission, arriving at our solar system without ever having seen it before. The book is first and foremost a visual feast. But the relatively brief essays are still insightful, even poetic, and relate the images in the book to our modern imaginations, fueled by our popular culture and how we were raised on science fiction. "Planetfall" is an extremely large format book, larger in size and much wider than even Benson's previous works, "Far Out" and "Beyond." The extra large size of the color plates helps the reader appreciate the majesty of the images. You can mentally immerse yourself in its pages. If you don't have this book and you are a lover of astronomy books, get it. If you already own it, buy it for someone as a Holiday gift, and open their eyes to the stunning beauty of our own solar system. Your sense of wonder will be refreshed and renewed by this wondrous photo essay depicting ourselves, and our immediate neighbors in the cosmos.

Many of the pictures in this book are breathtakingly beautiful. Totally worth it. My very minor gripes are: First, I wish it was more comprehensive in its coverage of the solar system. There isn't really any coverage of Mercury, Venus, Uranus, or Neptune (or the demoted Pluto), but not many nice pictures of those exist at anywhere on Earth anyway. Also, it sounds like Benson almost intended this book as an addendum to his other solar system book, "Beyond". Maybe there's more comprehensive coverage there. Second, the captions are all in the very back of the book. It's a little frustrating trying to flip through the pictures and read the captions at the same time. Third, many of the Earth photos are of smoke from burning forests. Benson pessimistically focuses on that a little

more than I would like. Overall, though, my complaints are very minor. This book is full of stunning photos of the celestial bodies of our solar system. Enjoy them.

This book is worthy of being in your collection of astronomical photography books, because it offers so many super-high-resolution photographs of the planets and the sun. There are no photos of stars (other than our own sun), no nebula or constellations or galaxies... just our own neighboring planets - that is the focus of this particular book. This book offers us the best available collection of the photos that have been taken within the past ten years only. One should bear in mind that some of the greatest astronomic photographs are more than ten years old, and so by definition, they will not be part of this book that covers just the past decade of astronomical planetary photography. I gave it 4 stars instead of 5 stars because I am a bit disappointed that the majority of the pictures are ultra-close-ups on parts of a planet or ring system showing just a very limited range of colors (for example: just black and white and blue.... or just black and white and amber). Also, many of the photos actually don't seem to be extremely high resolution. (Though many others, such as the surface of the sun, or the surface of mars, are strikingly high-resolution and spectacular). This is not the fault of the author / publisher / compiler... that's just the way it is, and this book catalogs and showcases the past ten years of planetary photography as well as one could possibly realistically hope that it would. If you are looking for a book that shows the colorful awesomeness and jaw-dropping beauty of the universe... a book that focusses more on parts of the universe far more distant (star clusters and nebulae) has more "wow" factor than this book. But if you would like a compendium of the best of planetary photography over just the past ten years... you cannot do better than this very well-done volume.

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