



*For release: August 2009*

**In August 2009, the International Astronomical Union meets for the first time since the decision to demote Pluto to dwarf status.**

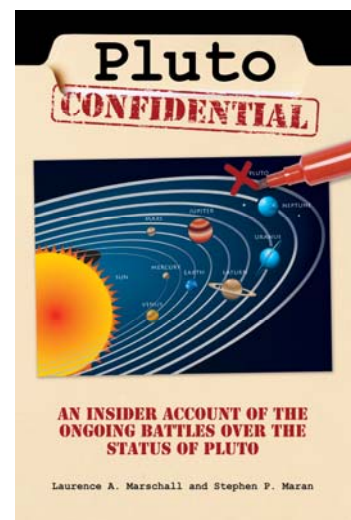
**Two renowned astronomers take opposing sides in the highly publicized debate over Pluto's planetary status.**

When the International Astronomical Union adopted a new definition of a "planet" in August 2006, Pluto lost its title as the ninth planet in our solar system and became a dwarf planet. The subsequent reaction proved the decision controversial, pitting scientist against scientist and evoking sentiments and nostalgia from the rest of the world.

The decision to demote Pluto came on the last day of the 2006 IAU General Assembly, which was attended by about 2,400 people, although only 424 actually voted on Pluto's status. The passionate response to Pluto's dwarf planet status has become a highly publicized debate, which is still as hot as ever. In August 2009, the IAU will reconvene in Rio de Janeiro for the first time since the divisive decision.

Written by an astronomer and educator who voted for the IAU resolution – Laurence A. Marschall – and a NASA worker who supported the opposing petition that resulted – Stephen P. Maran, *Pluto Confidential: An Insider Account of the Ongoing Battles over the Status of Pluto* is a two-sided guide to understanding the debate behind the status of Pluto.

– MORE –



### **Qualifications to Be Met to Achieve Planet Status**

- 1) The object must be in orbit around the Sun.
- 2) The object must be massive enough to be a sphere by its own gravitational force. More specifically, its own gravity should pull it into a shape of hydrostatic equilibrium.
- 3) It must have cleared the neighborhood around its orbit

### **Qualification Pluto Fails to Meet**

Pluto does not clear the neighborhood around its orbit

Its mass is only 0.07 times that of the mass of the other objects in its orbit (Earth's mass, by contrast, is 1.7 million times the remaining mass in its own orbit), resulting in its demotion to a dwarf planet

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## INSIDE:

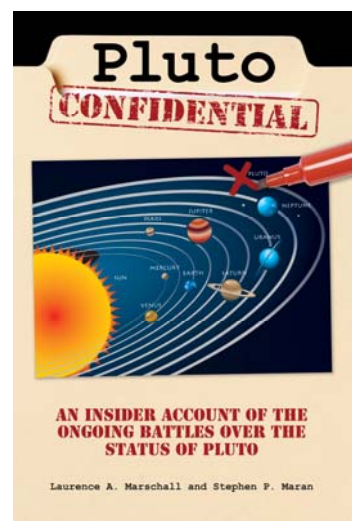
- The IAU's definition of planet and dwarf planet
- The argument to reinstate Pluto as a planet and the argument to keep Pluto as a dwarf planet
- The history of planetary disputes
- The discovery of Pluto's moons: Charon, Nix and Hydra
- The discovery of Kuiper Belt Objects
- What are exoplanets and how are they also excluded like Pluto from the IAU's definition of a planet

With its easy-to-navigate chapters, *Pluto Confidential* will teach you how the resolution first came to be in Prague, what it means for astronomy and how this decision will change the future of space objects forever.

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**Laurence Marschall, PhD**, is the W.K.T. Sahn Professor of Physics at Gettysburg College. He writes a regular column for *Natural History* magazine and is a contributing editor of *Smithsonian Air and Space*. He also adds annual astronomy updates to the *World Book Encyclopedia*. He serves as deputy press officer of the American Astronomical Society. Marschall has written for *Sky and Telescope*, *Astronomy*, *Natural History*, *Discover*, *Harper's*, *Newsday* and *The New York Times Book Review*.

**Stephen P. Maran, PhD**, spent more than 35 years in NASA, working on the Hubble Space Telescope and other scientific projects and is the press officer for the American Astronomical Society. His previous books include *Astronomy for Dummies®* and *The Astronomy and Astrophysics Encyclopedia*. His honors include the naming of an asteroid for him by the IAU and the NASA Medal for Exceptional Achievement.



## Fun facts about Pluto

\*At some point in its orbit, Pluto is closer to the sun than Neptune

\*If it were closer to the Sun, Pluto would be a comet

\*Pluto has three moons

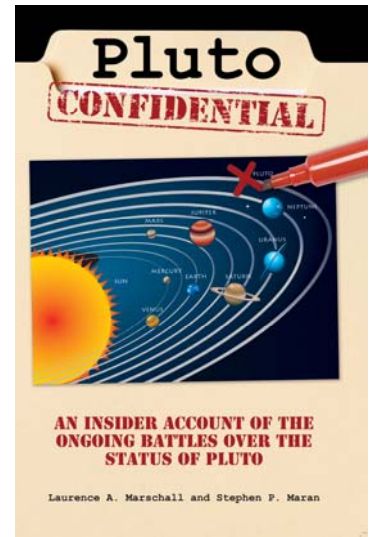
\*Pluto's mass is less than 1 percent of Earth's mass

\*Pluto is smaller than seven of the solar system's moons, including our own

For more information contact:

**Suggested Interview Questions for  
Laurence A. Marschall and Stephen P. Maran  
Authors of  
PLUTO CONFIDENTIAL**

1. Why did Pluto's demotion cause an uproar?
2. Do you think the IAU will reconsider its decision based on the passion behind those who wish to reinstate Pluto back into planethood?
3. How will this change how bodies are classified in the future? How much does this affect the future of astronomy?
4. Do you support the decision or do you oppose it? Why?
5. Since Pluto is the only planet discovered by an American, does this debate change American astronomy?
6. Why did less than 5 percent of IAU members vote on the measure? Is there a quorum the organization has to meet?
7. What other celestial objects are left out?
8. What are some good arguments to classify Pluto as a dwarf planet? What are some good arguments to reinstate it?
9. When and why did the classification "dwarf planet" come to be?
10. Some scientists are refusing to recognize the IAU's decision. What sort of things are they doing to show their opposition?



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