



## The Planets

By Dava Sobel

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**Dava Sobel's *The Glass Universe* will be available from Viking in December 2016**

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*

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

*Starred Review.* Sobel's purpose in this lovely and personal volume is to show us the planets as she sees them. Writing in quite a different mode than in her best-selling *Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter*, Sobel offers intimate essays inspired by the planets in our solar system, which she describes as "an assortment of magic beans or precious gems in a little private cabinet of wonder—portable, evocative, and swirled in beauty." She frames each essay in a different light, using a particular planet as a stepping stone toward a discussion of larger issues. Her "Jupiter" essay becomes a meditation on astrology, while her essay on the Sun, which relates the actual birth of the universe seemingly ex nihilo, evokes the Genesis account of creation in both its themes and the cadence of its language. Put simply, Sobel's conceits work (even, remarkably, the essay on Mars written from the perspective of a Martian rock) because each beautifully frames its planet. An essay that begins with the story of Sobel's grandmother coming to the United States as an immigrant, for example, sets up the author's musings on the odd nature of Pluto as somewhere in between "planet" and "other." This resonant and eclectic collection—informative, entertaining and poetic—is a joy to read.

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#### From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—The authors lifelong fascination with our solar system is evident in these essays that blend the latest scientific knowledge with popular culture, mythology, astrology, literature, music, and more. Beginning with the Big Bang and the Sun in Genesis, Sobel presents the nine planets in turn, inviting readers to share her sense of wonder. Each selection begins with a different point of view. In Sci-Fi, an ancient meteorite talks of the formation and physical nature of Mars; it is followed by an imaginative discussion of the colonization of the planet, including the views of science-fiction writers. Night Air begins with a letter from Caroline Herschel, daughter of Uranus discoverer William Herschel, and also his assistant to the American astronomer Maria Mitchell. Readers will probably assume that this is a real letter; not until the Details section at the end of the book is it revealed that it is fiction, although factually accurate. The writing is clear and elegant, almost lyrical at times, and the research is thorough. This unique and attractive book will be of interest to both science students and general readers.—*Sandy Freund, Richard Byrd Library, Fairfax County, VA*

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#### From Bookmarks Magazine

Sobel, author of best-selling *Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter*, combines spare, poetic, and descriptive writing with facts worthy of a textbook. Readers will be familiar with some of Sobel's stories about Kepler, Galileo, and Halley, but lesser-known ones featuring Maria Mitchell or Clyde Tombaugh will fascinate neophytes. While Sobel cleverly makes each planet relevant to various themes, from women's issues to modern technologies, and never fails to entertain, critics agree that *Planets* is not her best work to date. A few critics took umbrage at the chapter on Jupiter, which, in its embrace of astrology, undermines her scientific credibility. In addition, some critics viewed the different voices of each essay as schizophrenic. In the end, however, *Planets* won't disappoint sky gazers, especially those forever done with textbooks.

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