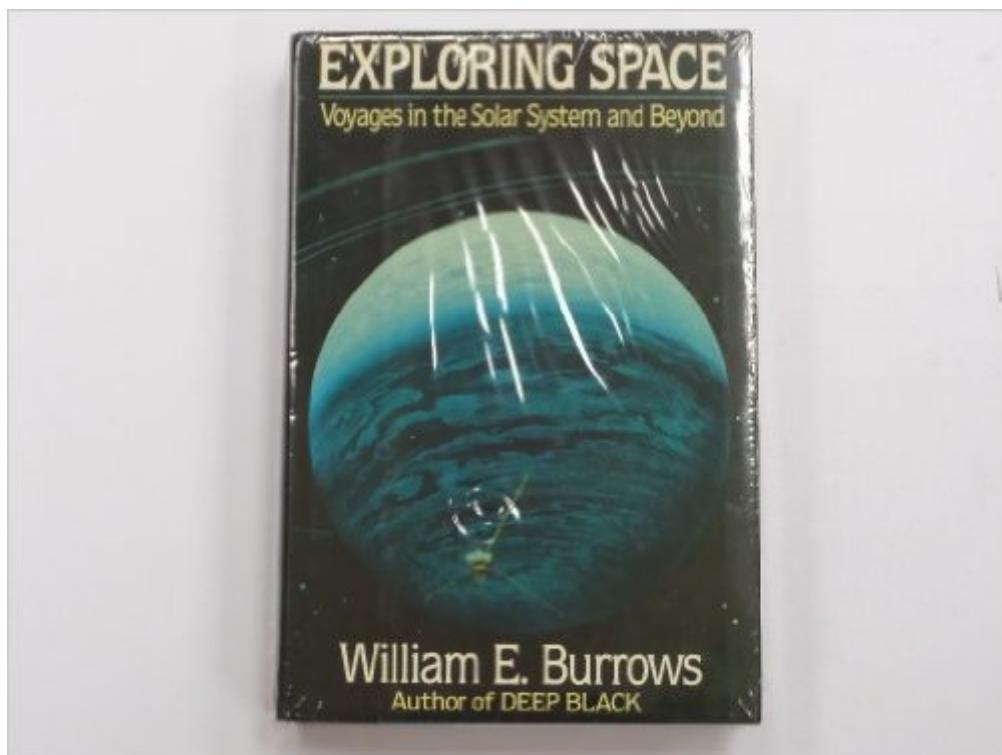


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Exploring Space: Voyages In The Solar System And Beyond



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Customer Reviews

William E. Burrows is well known as an historian of the American space program. This book, "Exploring Space," was one of his early forays into the subject. It deals with the planetary exploration efforts of NASA from the beginning of the space age until the Voyager probes sent to the outer planets. He takes as his starting point with a blue ribbon panel in 1980 to devise objectives in planetary science and goals for missions to carry them out. The report resulting from that, "Planetary Exploration Through the Year 2000" appeared in 1983 and a revision reassessed status in 1986. From that point Burrows discusses the various planetary missions of NASA through the end of the cold war beginning with the Mariner 2 Venus probe in 1962. This was the first successful planetary probe and fitting opening to planetary exploration. There followed efforts to explore Mars, eventually landing there with two Viking spacecraft in 1976, and encounters in the outer Solar System by Pioneers 10 and 11 and Voyagers 1 and 2 in the 1970s and thereafter. "Exploring Space: Voyages in the Solar System and Beyond" is a valuable snapshot of planetary exploration by a superb writer of space history. It is highly accessible, with the stories of scientists and engineers taking center stage in telling about this age of discovery. It was published just as the lag in missions to the planets was coming to the end, and a second volume should be written on the period since 1990 when Galileo and Cassini undertook sustained exploration of the Jupiter and Saturn planetary systems, as the assault on Mars that began with Mars Pathfinder in 1997, and New Horizons took off for Pluto and the Kuiper Belt at the outer fringes of the Solar System.

There are no parades for robots. They aren't heroes either. That's why manned spaceflight has always taken center stage, but these robots went first and to where man cannot go. They were (and are) the first explorers. Burrows unveils their turbulent history - often competing for funds from manned spaceflight, their often turbulent development in funding and political wars - and their failures and even greater successes. For those who don't follow spaceflight, this will be an eye-opener on our robotic armada, with all the drama of humans in space. Burrows' newer book This New Ocean: The Story of the First Space Age updates this a bit into the 1990s. But beginning in those years, a second phase of space probes, even more aggressive than the first, began to spread out among the Solar System. Maybe someday Burrows or someone else will provide an updated account of these explorers.

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