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Pluto: The Dwarf Planet That Sparked Curiosity



Pluto, once considered the ninth planet in our solar system, has captured the imagination of people around the world for decades. While it may no longer hold the title of a full-fledged planet, Pluto remains a fascinating and mysterious world in its own right. In this exploration, we will uncover everything you need to know about Pluto, the dwarf planet that sparked curiosity.

Pluto's Discovery

Pluto was discovered on February 18, 1930, by American astronomer Clyde Tombaugh. The discovery was made at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. At the time, Pluto was hailed as the ninth planet in our solar system, but this status would later be reevaluated.

Characteristics of Pluto

Pluto is a small and icy world located in the outer reaches of our solar system, within a region known as the Kuiper Belt. It has a diameter of about 2,377 kilometers (1,474 miles), making it much smaller than Earth's moon. Pluto's surface is composed primarily of rock and water ice, and its thin atmosphere consists of nitrogen, methane, and carbon monoxide.

Pluto's Moons

Pluto has five known moons, the largest of which is Charon. Charon is so large in comparison to Pluto that the two bodies are sometimes considered a binary system. The other four moons, Nix, Hydra, Kerberos, and Styx, are much smaller and were discovered in more recent years.

Name _____

The Demotion of Pluto

In 2006, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) redefined the criteria for classifying objects as planets, and Pluto no longer met the requirements. Under the new definition, a planet must clear its orbit of other debris, and Pluto shares its orbital neighborhood with other Kuiper Belt objects. As a result, Pluto was reclassified as a "dwarf planet."

New Horizons Mission

One of the most significant events in Pluto's history was the arrival of NASA's New Horizons spacecraft in July 2015. After a journey of nearly a decade, New Horizons conducted a historic flyby of Pluto, capturing detailed images and data about the dwarf planet and its moons. The mission provided scientists with valuable information about Pluto's surface, atmosphere, and geological features.

Pluto's Mysteries

Despite the data gathered by New Horizons, Pluto remains a world full of mysteries. Scientists are still working to understand its unique features, such as the vast heart-shaped region known as Tombaugh Regio. They are also intrigued by the presence of nitrogen glaciers, ice mountains, and possible subsurface oceans on this distant world.

Pluto, once the ninth planet in our solar system and now classified as a dwarf planet, continues to be a subject of scientific study and wonder. While it may be small and distant, Pluto's exploration has expanded our knowledge of the outer reaches of our solar system and the intriguing diversity of celestial bodies that reside there. As our technology advances, we can only imagine what other secrets Pluto may reveal in the future.

