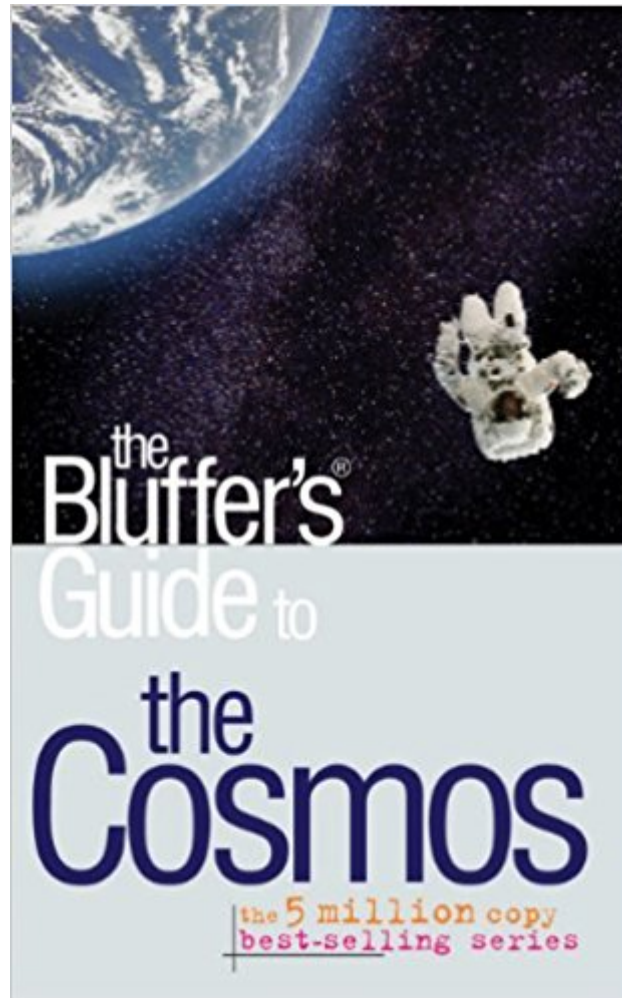




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The Bluffer's Guide To The Cosmos (Bluffer's Guides)



Synopsis

Size doesn't matter When it comes to the size of the cosmos, just remember that it's not size but how you bluff it that matters. True bluffers won't bother about the size of the Solar System. It's too small. Things are always colliding with each other. Size does matter While Galileo got by with a lens the size of a mandarin orange, today's astronomers scour the heavens using mirrors that range from the size of an average swimming pool to a new class of telescopes destined to exceed tennis court size; one of which is sited in Chile and aptly named the Very Large Telescope (VLT). Cosmologists are happiest when stating the obvious. Another one in prospect is of football-field proportions, and known as the Overwhelmingly Large Telescope (OWL for short). Measure for measure The Hubble trouble that sabotaged the \$1.5 billion space telescope project was an error of 1.3 mm (.05 inches), and it required a space mission to fix it. More recently, instructions using imperial instead of metric measurement sent a Mars probe into oblivion. Condensed milk All the stars seen in the night sky are in Earth's home galaxy, which got its name, Via Lactea, from the Romans who, lacking imagination, simply borrowed the name from a Greek myth involving the breast of a goddess spurting milk across the sky.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you found the Smartest Guy in the Pub and he turned out not to be Stephen Hawking, he might sound like the author of this spirited 85-page whirlwind tour of where--and within which--we live. In a couple of hours, with or without drinks, perhaps the Guy's ramblings would sound like these here:

witty, fact-laden, trivia studded, and full of pretty good jokes, given what appears a Bluffer's Guide style sheet that insists on about as many attempts at snark and humor per paragraph as The Onion or a sit-com script. Daniel Hudon, a Canadian science writer, even gets a couple of World Cup remarks in, and his love of both astronomy and knowledge on a less elevated plane makes these pages fly by, full of interest. Even the little glossary manages to pack a pun or chortle into each definition, no small feat. I now know why Sirius is called the Dog Star, how Polaris looks as if the skies revolve around it, and that blue stars are hotter than red or white. I must take Dr. Hudon's word for it that there's a galaxy named "You Should See the Other Guy" (M65). While I did not find always the "why" answered (as in if what it means if we live in a beige-hued universe, or if our Sun is a star and stars suns, what then?), the spark here helped sum up a few concepts that my long-ago classes failed to make stick. For example, how single-celled organisms produced oxygen to jumpstart life on earth, how the Moon stabilized Earth's orbit and helped it nurture life, and how life may have come via space junk falling from above billions of years ago all fit, even if spread across the pages, to bring the cosmos down to earth, so to speak.

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