

the
**PLUTO
FILES**

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Since its discovery in 1930, Pluto has held a warm place in the public imagination. So, when the American Museum of Natural History's Hayden Planetarium stopped calling Pluto a planet, director Neil deGrasse Tyson found himself at the center of a firestorm led by angry, Pluto-loving elementary school students. NOVA joins Tyson on a quest to find out why this cold and distant rock has captured so many hearts.

In Boston, at Harvard University's football field, Tyson meets up with some heavy-hitters at the top of their scientific game. In a good-natured debate over Pluto's status, Tyson keeps "score" of Pluto's planet-like characteristics vs. its oddball traits.

At Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, Tyson meets world-famous cartoon character, Pluto, and Walt Disney's great nephew, Roy Patrick Disney, with whom he discusses the origin of the loveable pup.

One of the most memorable stops along the way is Streator, Illinois, home to Pluto discoverer Clyde Tombaugh. In 1930, Tombaugh, a self-taught 24-year-old farm boy reported his discovery of the "planet." Delving deeper into Tombaugh history, Tyson visits Tombaugh family members in New Mexico, including his 97-year-old widow and is humbled by the collection of Tombaugh's homemade telescopes, made from discarded car parts and not always surplus farm equipment.

In California, Tyson pays a visit to astrophysicists Mike Brown and David Jewitt. It was their desire to see beyond the outer solar system that led to the discovery of the Kuiper Belt and eventually the debate over Pluto's planetary status.

The frenzied discussion centered on Pluto led the International Astronomical Union (IAU) to do something that hadn't been done since the ancient Greeks formally defined the word planet—update its definition. The new definition of planet states that a planet must clear the neighborhood around its orbit—not good news for Pluto or Brown's discovery since they are both surrounded by Kuiper Belt objects. So in 2006, after 75 years in the limelight, Pluto was no longer a planet. Within days of the announcement, a petition signed by hundreds of scientists rejected the IAU decision.

Making his way back, Tyson stops at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Lab in Baltimore, Maryland, where he meets Alan Stern, a staunch Pluto supporter and one of the world's leading experts on Pluto. Stern's assessment of Pluto is that it is a new kind of planet, a dwarf planet.

So then, what is Pluto? Is it a planet? Is it just an ice ball? The debate continues. This film is entertaining and enlightening, filled with great stories including scientific history, current debate, and human emotion. The program also includes special appearances by Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, Diane Sawyer, and Brian Williams, who share their affection for the former planet.

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CREDITS

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