

The love note From space

By Richard Fowler

Have you ever heard that internal voice, challenging you to take the paper you just screwed up and throw it across the room into that enticingly open bin?

There you are, some metres away. You decide to get the undivided attention of those around you to witness this marvel of skill and accuracy. Once everybody's eyes are engaged in this peacock-like show, you decide to launch this missile with a graceful glide. All eyes follow its trajectory, and you feel a sense of anticipation rise in the room. As the missile nears its destination, colleagues rise out of their chairs for a better view, with cheers and applause at the ready. But then, you realise the inevitable, and your heart

sinks: it's going to miss, and as the screwed-up paper bounces next to the bin, the collective tension in the room deflates.

Yet, this near display of precision and accuracy pales into astronomical insignificance when compared to what the world got to witness in July 2015. Imagine throwing that screwed-up paper and trying to hit a target several billion kilometres away (the distance from earth to Pluto ranges from 2.7 billion to 7.5 billion km). Well, that's exactly what we did. Except we threw, not a screwed up piece of paper, but a grand piano sized package of technology known as 'New Horizons', at a cost of \$900 million. It took just under ten years to get there, helped by a 84,000km/h push from Jupiter...don't you just love gravity!¹

It is truly amazing what man is able to do: send a hurtling body of metal into the deepest, darkest depths of one of the loneliest places in our orbiting solar system to meet a target travelling at thousands of kilometres an hour. If you were to take the same lonely journey in a car travelling at 100km/h, it would take you well over 6,000 years.

And what a treat we saw when we got there! Emerging from the darkness was an image that was as surprising as it was poetic: Pluto's unseen love note hidden from humanity's eyes until now. What was it? An enormous and accurately 'drawn' heart shape onto the surface of what is now humbly called 'asteroid number 134340'. It reminded me of some lyrics sung by Rihanna: 'We found love in a hopeless place'.

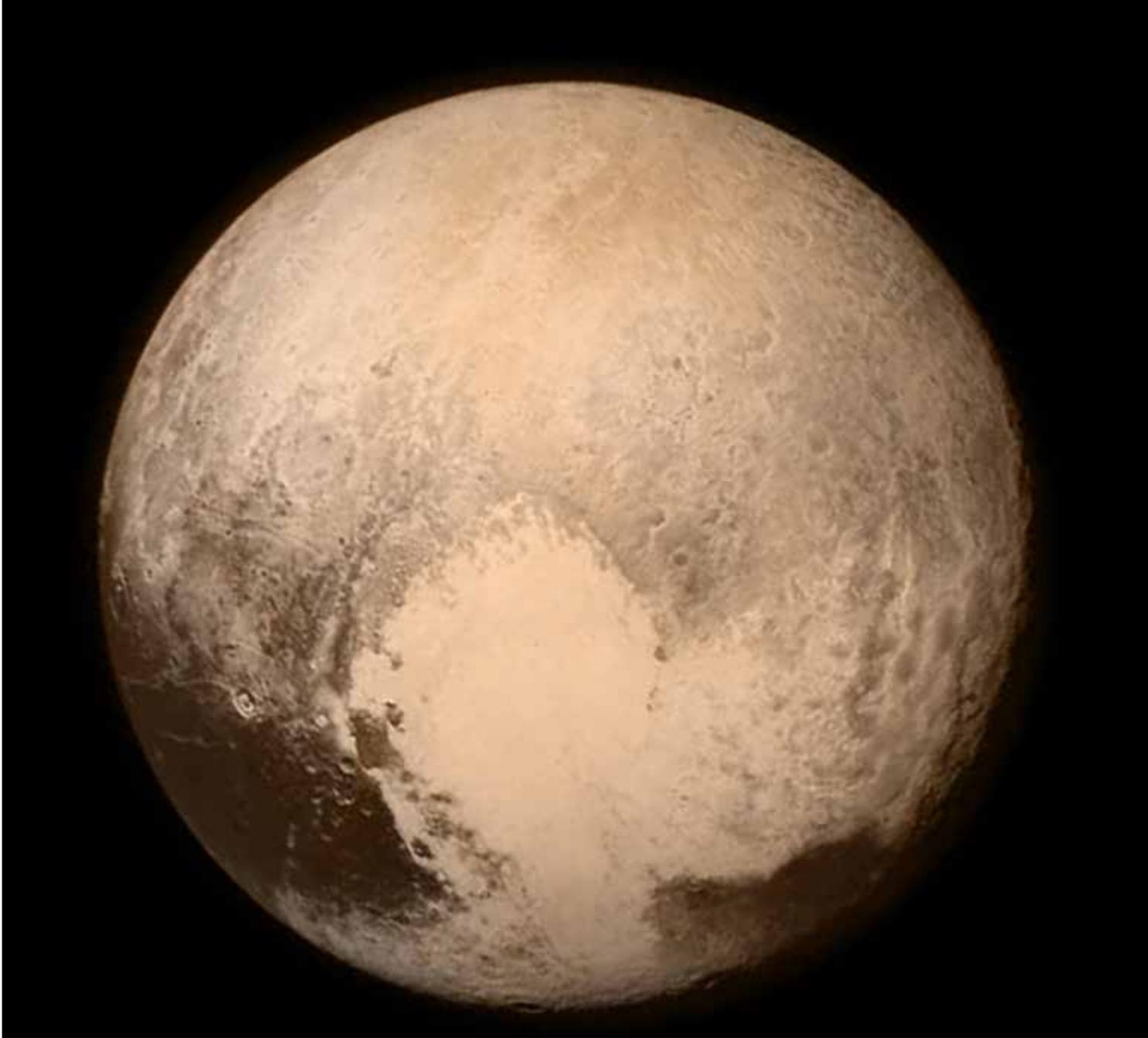
And that's just the point...we did! With this heart splashed across Pluto's surface, there is something to be learned. You see, all this time Pluto has been carrying a metaphorical message for us, a message that we have had to probe the darkest part of our solar system to uncover. Maybe we could look at it this way: no matter how dark it gets in our lives, no matter how lonely we feel, no matter how tough things become in life, God's love is still present, God's compassion towards us never fails!

In fact this message, believe it or not, has been around for centuries. This message written on the surface

An artist's concept drawing of NASA's New Horizons spacecraft speeding towards its 14 July 2015 flyby of Pluto and Charon at the edge of our solar system.

Inside Life





of Pluto was actually written on the pages of a very special book:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say: 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me', even the night shall be light about me...How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you.²

David, the warrior king and psalmist who wrote this, understood one thing: that the way we sometimes feel is not always reflected in how God feels. Simply put, no matter how lonely or difficult life gets, God is always there, ever present. His wanting us to succeed is never failing.

This is not to say that we will not have difficulties in our lives or that every problem will be solved by understanding the reality of God's compassion towards us, of course not. But knowing this reality will help us develop the mind-set that encourages us to pursue purpose, even when it's hard, even if it means accepting discomfort in our lives. This mind-set can be found in Pluto's

message; not a sentimental heart measuring some 2,000 km across, but an intimation that tells us that God is there for us, that he loves us, and that he will not leave us when we face our darkest, loneliest, and toughest times. It is a love that we don't have to travel across the solar system for, nor one that can be measured!

Notes

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/space/11728951/Giant-heart-spotted-on-Pluto-inclosest-ever-pictures-of-dwarf-planet.html>.

² Psalm 139:7–11, 17-18.

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