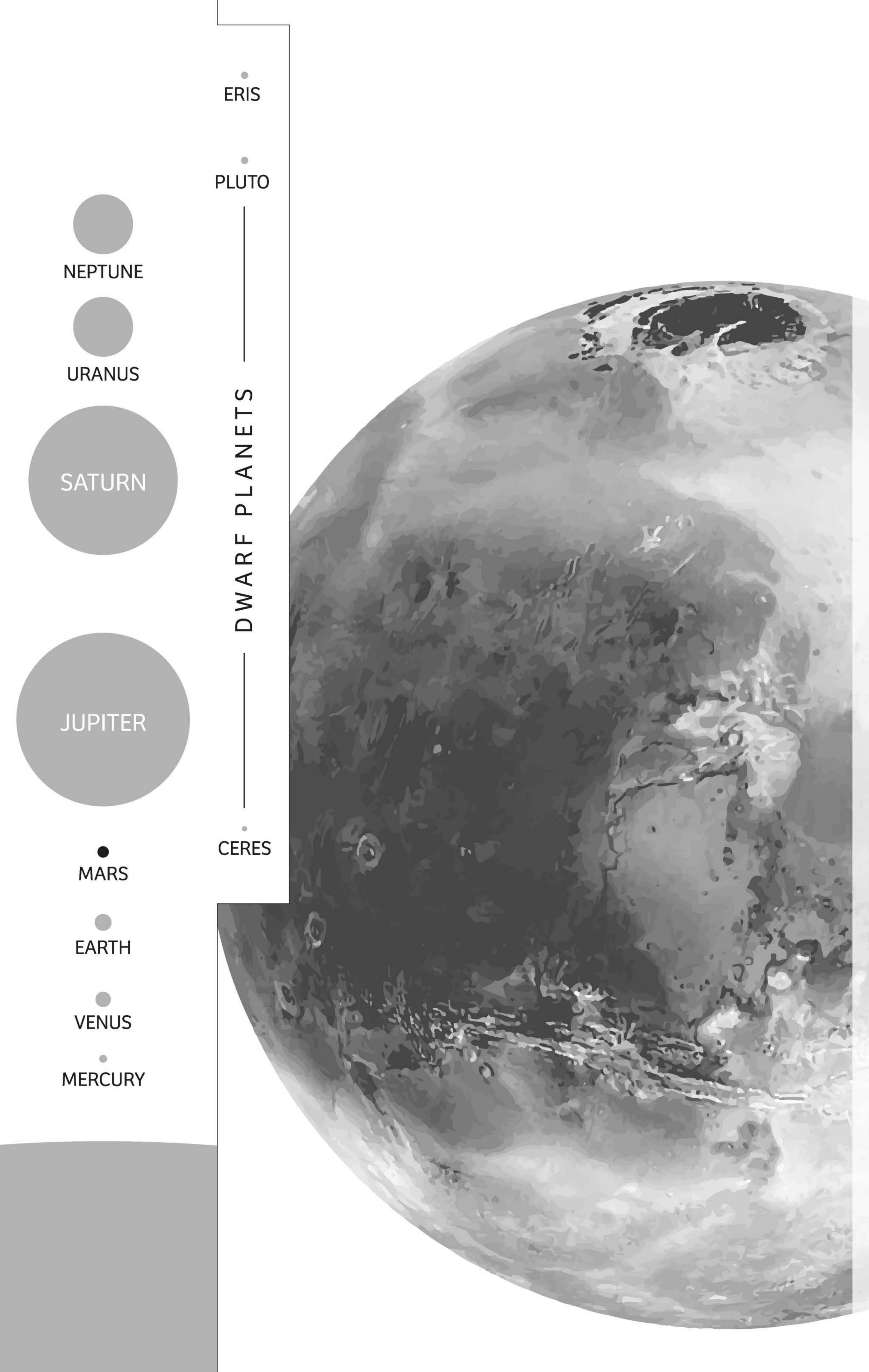


SUN

MARS: THE FOURTH PLANET FROM THE SUN: A ROCKY (TERRESTRIAL) PLANET



Mars is often called the red planet, its colour caused by iron oxide dust on the surfaces. It has a very thin atmosphere mostly of carbon dioxide, and polar caps composed of both carbon dioxide and water ice. Geological features and recent robotic exploration suggest the past existence of water on the sufrace of the planet. An extinct volcano call Olympus Mons, is at 25 km high the solar system's largest mountain. the Valles Marineris canyon (across the centre of the image) is over 4000 km long and up to 7 km deep.

Mars has two small moons, Phobos (diameter 22 km) and Deimos (13 km). Both are thought to be captured asteroids. Phobos, in a close orbit, will eventually crash into the planet or break up to form a ring.

Between Mars and Jupiteer lies the Asteroid Belt, where several hundred thousand small rocky objects exist, twenty-six of which are known to be over 200 km in diameter.

MARS STATISTICS

Distance from Earth: 6,795 (0.533 x Earth)

Mass: 0.11 x Earth

Mean distance from the Sun: 1.52 AU*

(228 million km)

Orbital period (sidereal**): 687 days Rotational period: 24 hrs 37 mins

Moons: 2

Inclination of equator to orbit: 25.2 degrees Composition: 50% iron rich core, molten

rocky mantle & thin crust

FASCINATING FACT: Mars' Olympus Mons is the solar system's highest mountain, 25 km high and 550 km across.

^{*} One Astronomical Unit (AU) = mean distance of the Earth from the Sun.

^{**} Sidereal time is time kept with respect to distant stars.