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In this chapter you will discover...

- the properties of dwarf planets
- the properties and orbits of asteroids
- the properties and orbits of comets
- the properties of meteoroids, meteors, and meteorites
- that wayward asteroids have, and could again, threaten life on Earth

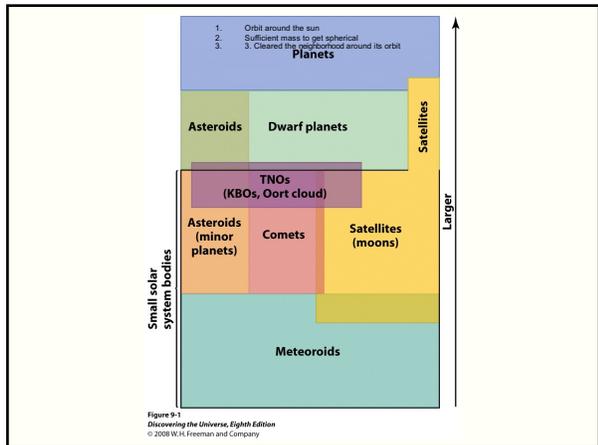
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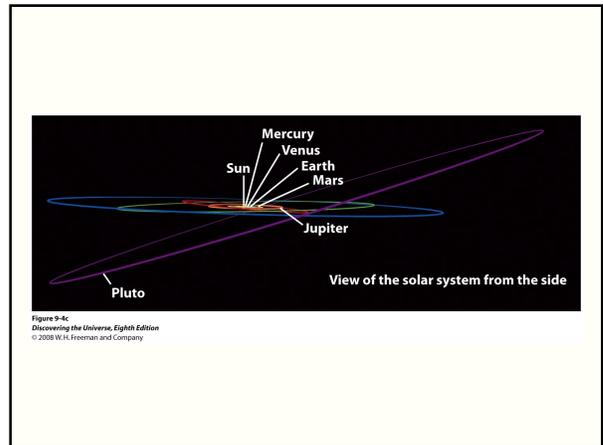
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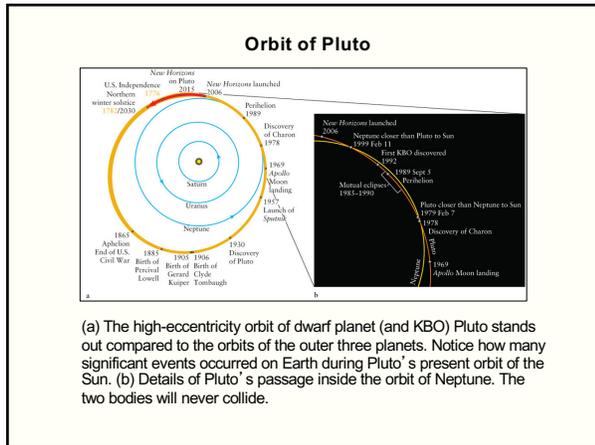
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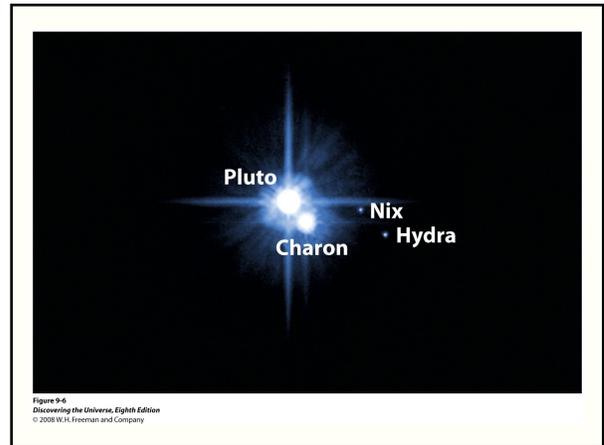
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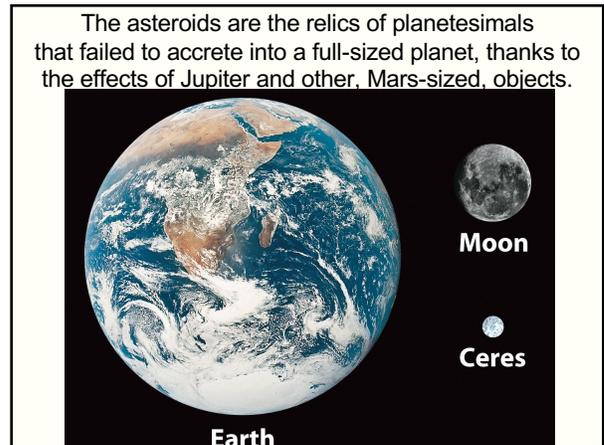
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A search for a planet between Mars and Jupiter led to the discovery of asteroids

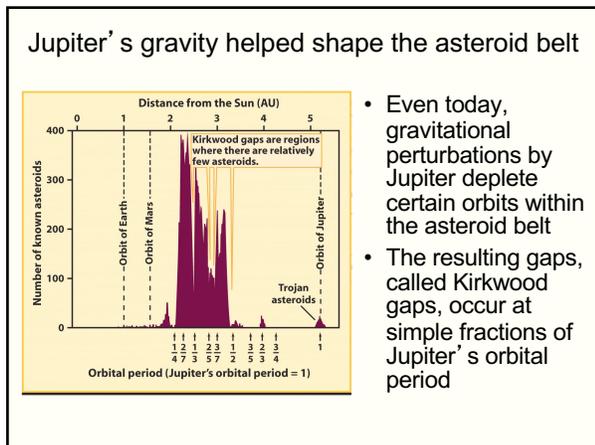
- Astronomers first discovered the asteroids while searching for a "missing planet"
- Thousands of asteroids with diameters ranging from a few kilometers up to 1000 kilometers orbit within the asteroid belt between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter

Most asteroids orbit the Sun in a belt about 1.5 AU wide between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.

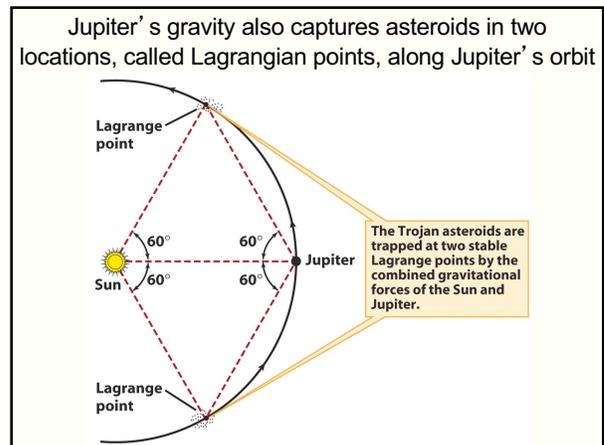
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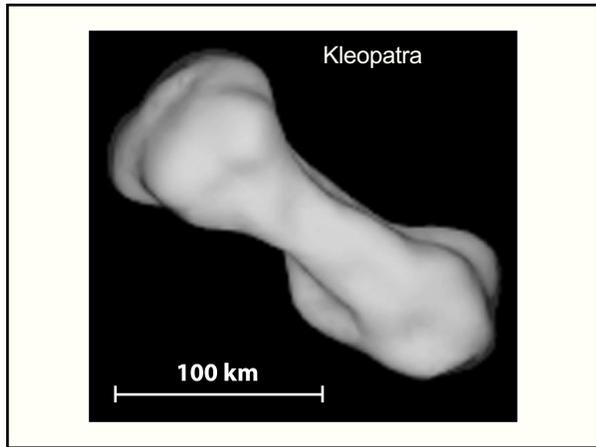
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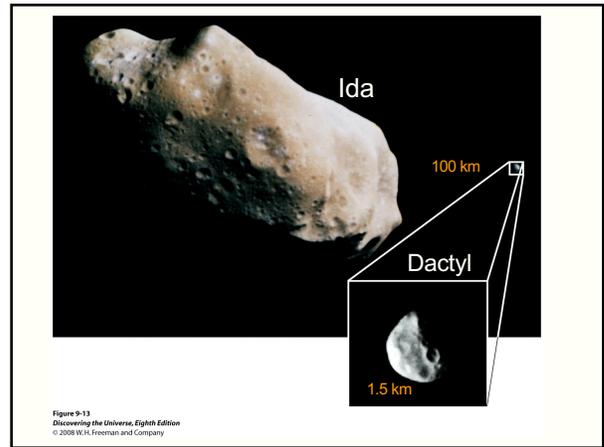
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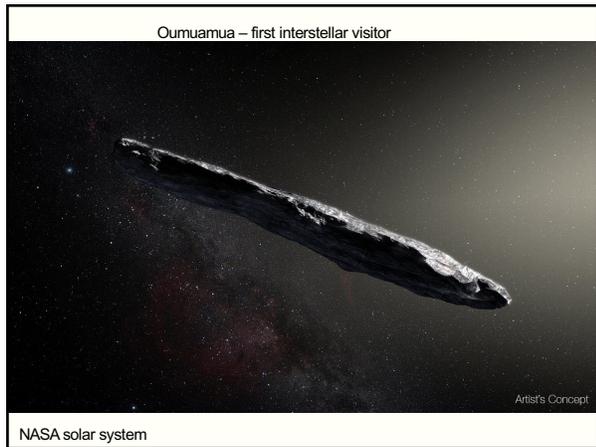
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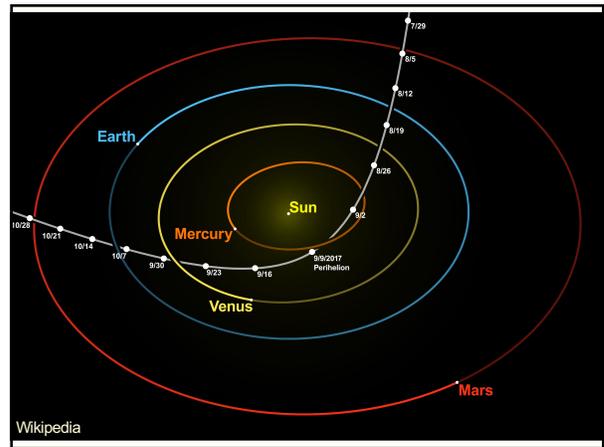
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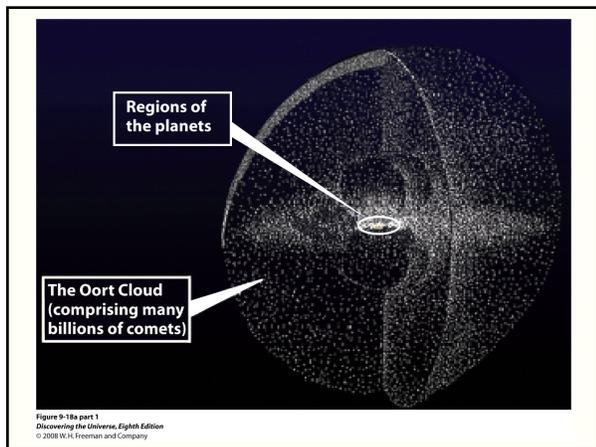
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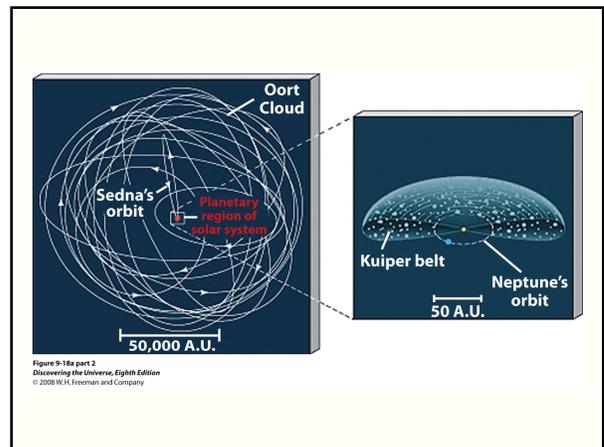
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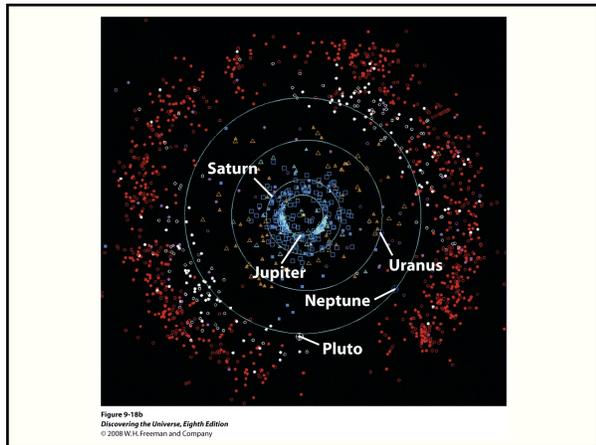
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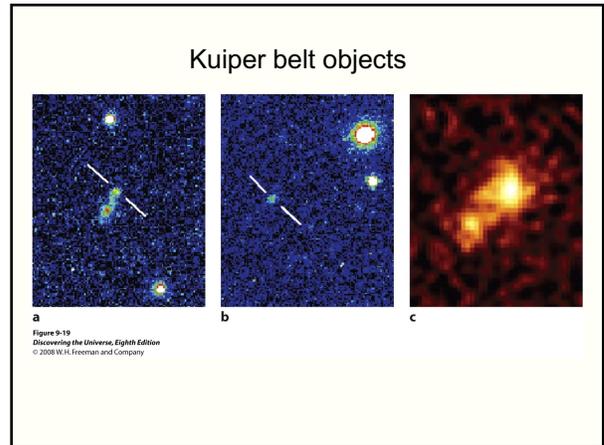
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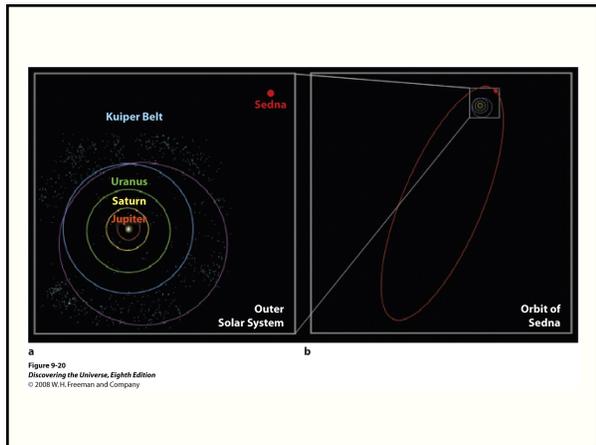
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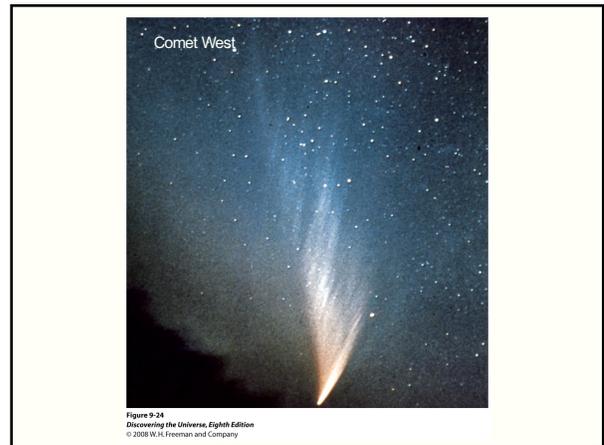
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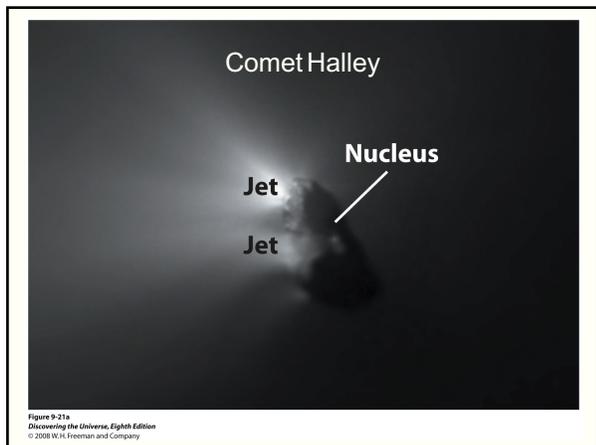
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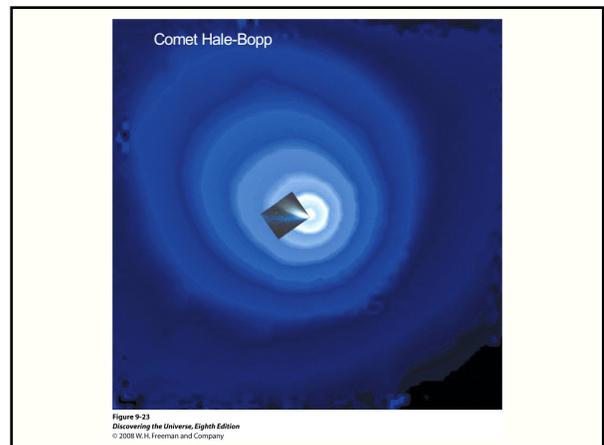
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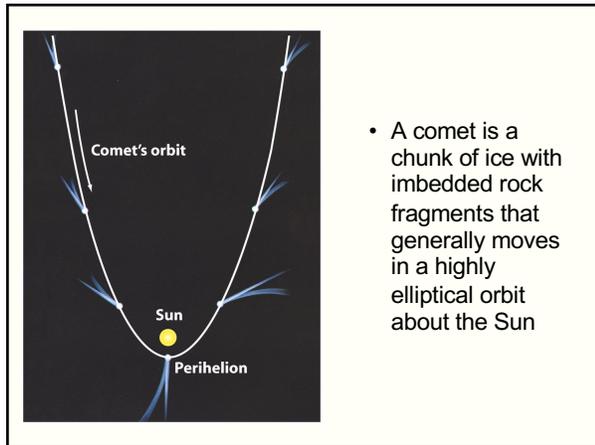
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- A comet is a chunk of ice with imbedded rock fragments that generally moves in a highly elliptical orbit about the Sun

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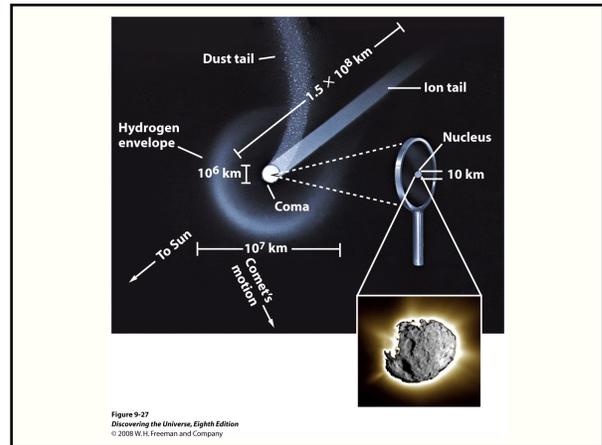


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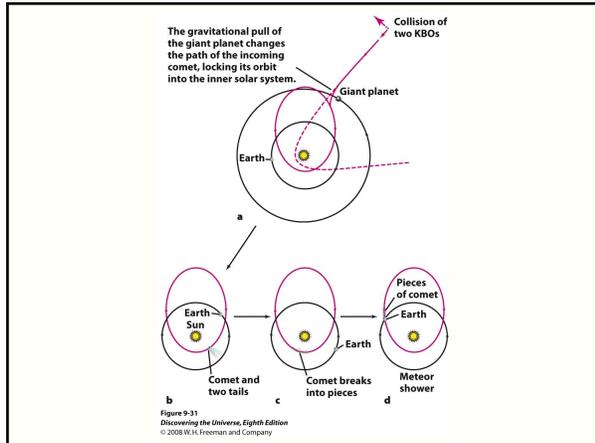
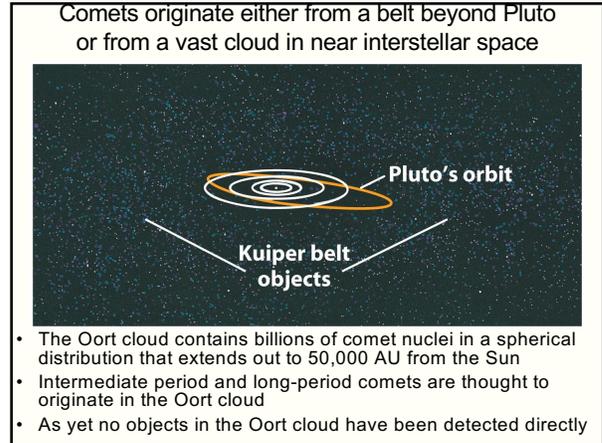
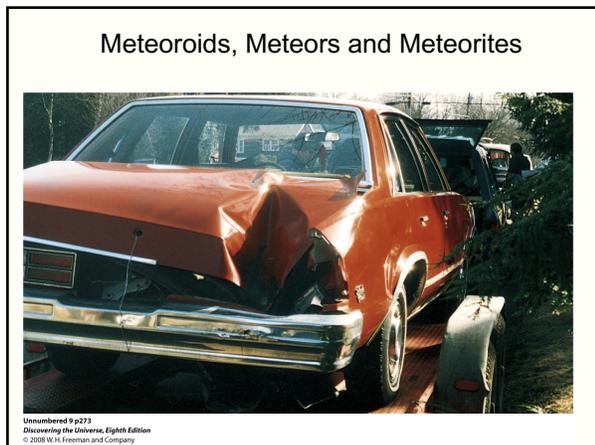


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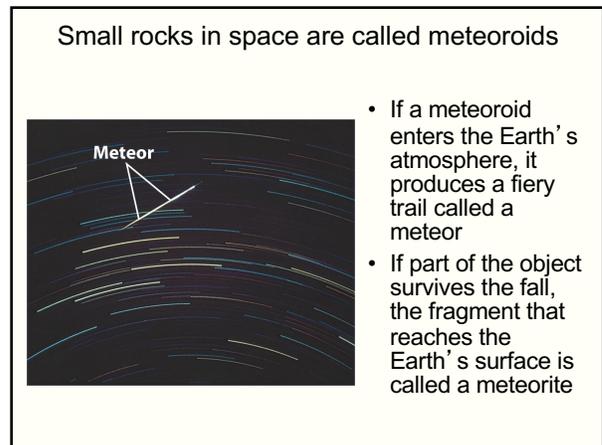


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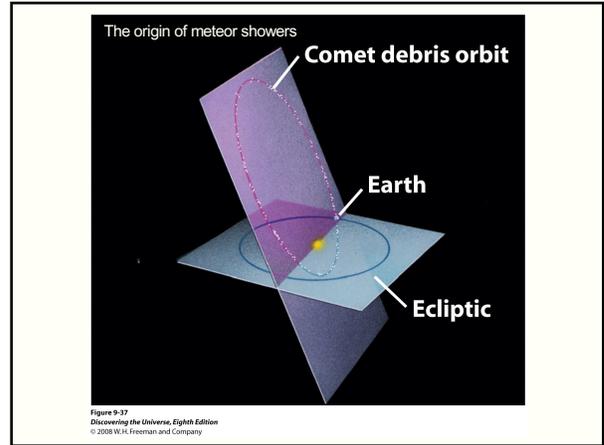
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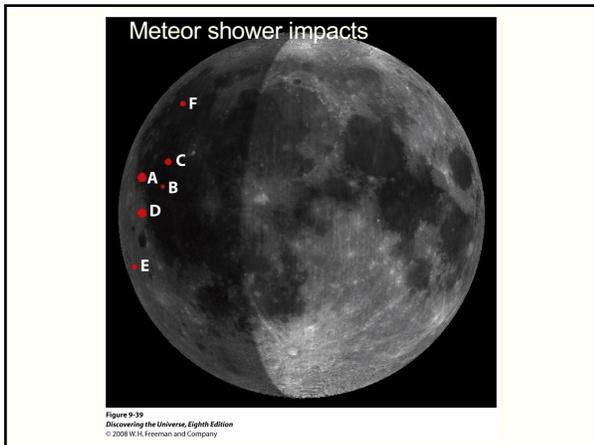
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PROMINENT YEARLY METEOR SHOWERS

Shower	Date of maximum intensity	Typical hourly rate	Constellation
Quadrantids	January 3	40	Boötes
Lyrids	April 22	15	Lyra
Eta Aquarids	May 4	20	Aquarius
Delta Aquarids	July 30	20	Aquarius
Perseids	August 12	80	Perseus
Orionids	October 21	20	Orion
Taurids	November 4	15	Taurus
Leonids	November 16	15	Leo Major
Geminids	December 13	50	Gemini
Ursids	December 22	15	Ursa Minor

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Meteorites are classified as stones, stony irons, or irons, depending on their composition

Many stony meteorites are coated with dark fusion crusts...

...but when cut and polished they reveal tiny specks of iron in the rock.

Iron meteorites are composed of nickel-iron minerals and are characterized by a surface covered with depressions...

...and when cut and polished, by interlocking crystals in a Widmanstätten pattern.

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Some meteorites retain traces of the early solar system

- Rare stony meteorites called carbonaceous chondrites may be relatively unmodified material from the solar nebula
- These meteorites often contain organic material and may have played a role in the origin of life on Earth



Analysis of isotopes in certain meteorites suggests that a nearby supernova may have triggered the formation of the solar system 4.56 billion years ago

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1908, asteroid exploded in atmosphere over Tunguska region

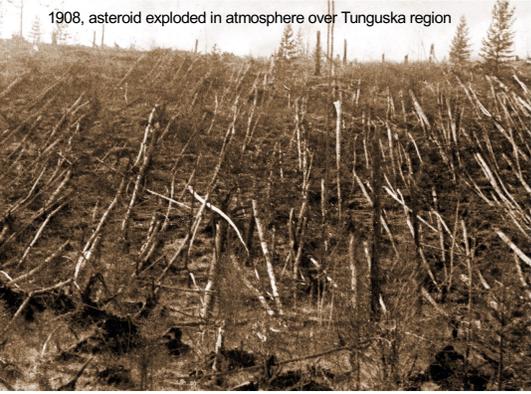


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Asteroids are found outside the asteroid belt and have struck the Earth

Some asteroids, called near-Earth objects, move in elliptical orbits that cross the orbits of Mars and Earth

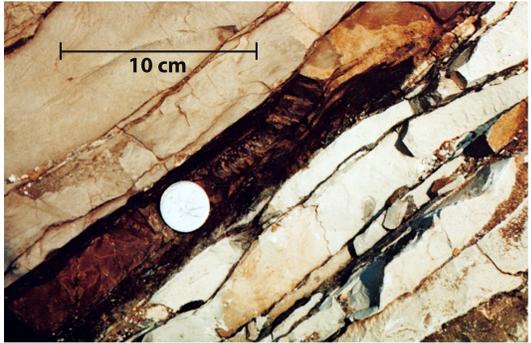
If such an asteroid strikes the Earth, it forms an impact crater whose diameter depends on both the mass and the speed of the asteroid



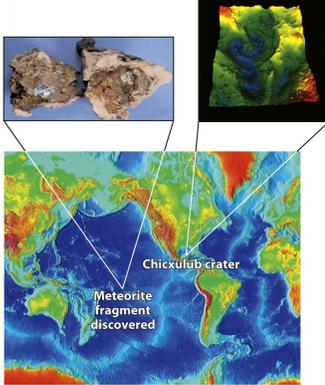
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An asteroid may have struck the Earth 65 million years ago, possibly causing the extinction of the dinosaurs and many other species



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65 Mill years ago: demise of the dinosaurs

250 Mill years ago: greater mass extinction - 80 - 90% of species of life perished

Chicxulub crater

Meteorite fragment discovered

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