

THE  
ESSENTIAL **Cosmic**  
**Perspective**  
EIGHTH EDITION

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# Contents

## PART I Developing Perspective

### 1 A Modern View of the Universe 1

Learning Goals 1

**1.1** The Scale of the Universe 2

**1.2** The History of the Universe 10

**1.3** Spaceship Earth 15

*Exercises and Problems* 21

**cosmic calculations 1.1** How Far Is a Light-Year? 4

*Basic Astronomical Definitions* 5

**common misconceptions** The Meaning of a Light-Year 6

**special topic** How Many Planets Are in Our Solar System? 7

**common misconceptions** Confusing Very Different Things 8

**cosmic context** FIGURE 1.9 Our Cosmic Origins 12

### 2 Discovering the Universe for Yourself 24

Learning Goals 24

**2.1** Patterns in the Night Sky 25

**2.2** The Reason for Seasons 32

**2.3** The Moon, Our Constant Companion 39

**2.4** The Ancient Mystery of the Planets 46

*Exercises and Problems* 50

**common misconceptions** The Moon Illusion 28

**cosmic calculations 2.1** Angular Size, Physical Size, and Distance 29

**common misconceptions** Stars in the Daytime 30

**common misconceptions** What Makes the North Star Special? 31

**common misconceptions** The Cause of Seasons 33

**special topic** How Long Is a Day? 33

**cosmic context** FIGURE 2.15 The Seasons 34

**common misconceptions** High Noon 37

**common misconceptions** Sun Signs 39

**common misconceptions** Shadows and the Moon 40

**common misconceptions** Moon in the Daytime 41

**common misconceptions** The “Dark Side” of the Moon 42

### 3 The Science of Astronomy 53

Learning Goals 53

**3.1** The Ancient Roots of Science 54

**3.2** Ancient Greek Science 58

**3.3** The Copernican Revolution 61

**3.4** The Nature of Science 68

*Exercises and Problems* 77

**cosmic calculations 3.1** Eratosthenes Measures Earth 59

**common misconceptions** Columbus and a Flat Earth 61

**cosmic calculations 3.2** Kepler’s Third Law 65

**extraordinary claims** Earth Orbits the Sun 68

**cosmic context** FIGURE 3.22 The Copernican Revolution 70

**common misconceptions** Eggs on the Equinox 72

**special topic** Astrology 73

**cosmic context** PART I AT A GLANCE: Our Expanding Perspective 80

## PART II Key Concepts for Astronomy

### 4 Making Sense of the Universe: Understanding Motion, Energy, and Gravity 82

Learning Goals 82

**4.1** Describing Motion: Examples from Daily Life 83

**4.2** Newton’s Laws of Motion 87

**4.3** Conservation Laws in Astronomy 90

**4.4** The Force of Gravity 95

*Exercises and Problems* 102

**common misconceptions** No Gravity in Space? 86

**common misconceptions** What Makes a Rocket Launch? 90

**cosmic calculations 4.1** Newton’s Version of Kepler’s Third Law 96

**common misconceptions** The Origin of Tides 98

**special topic** Why Does the Moon Always Show the Same Face to Earth? 99

## 5 Light: The Cosmic Messenger 105

Learning Goals 105

5.1 Basic Properties of Light and Matter 106

5.2 Learning from Light 112

5.3 Collecting Light with Telescopes 119

*Exercises and Problems* 131

**common misconceptions** Is Radiation Dangerous? 109

**common misconceptions** Can You Hear Radio Waves or See an X Ray? 109

**common misconceptions** The Illusion of Solidity 111

**cosmic calculations 5.1** Laws of Thermal Radiation 117

**cosmic calculations 5.2** The Doppler Shift 118

**cosmic context** FIGURE 5.16 Interpreting a Spectrum 120

**extraordinary claims** We Can Never Learn the Composition of Stars 122

**common misconceptions** Magnification and Telescopes 123

**special topic** Would You Like Your Own Telescope? 124

**common misconceptions** Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star 127

**common misconceptions** Closer to the Stars? 128

**cosmic context** PART II AT A GLANCE: The Universality of Physics 134

## PART III Learning from Other Worlds

## 6 Formation of the Solar System 136

Learning Goals 136

6.1 A Brief Tour of the Solar System 137

6.2 The Nebular Theory of Solar System Formation 151

6.3 Explaining the Major Features of the Solar System 154

6.4 The Age of the Solar System 163

*Exercises and Problems* 168

**cosmic context** FIGURE 6.1 The Solar System 138

**common misconceptions** Solar Gravity and the Density of Planets 158

**extraordinary claims** A Giant Impact Made by Our Moon 162

**cosmic calculations 6.1** Radiometric Dating 166

## 7 Earth and the Terrestrial Worlds 171

Learning Goals 171

7.1 Earth as a Planet 172

7.2 The Moon and Mercury: Geologically Dead 183

7.3 Mars: A Victim of Planetary Freeze-Drying 185

7.4 Venus: A Hothouse World 194

7.5 Earth as a Living Planet 198

*Exercises and Problems* 211

**common misconceptions** Earth Is Not Full of Molten Lava 173

**special topic** Seismic Waves 175

**cosmic calculations 7.1** The Surface Area-to-Volume Ratio 176

**common misconceptions** Why Is the Sky Blue? 181

**extraordinary claims** Martians! 186

**common misconceptions** The Greenhouse Effect Is Bad 202

**extraordinary claims** Human Activity Can Change the Climate 205

**cosmic context** FIGURE 7.49 Global Warming 206

## 8 Jovian Planet Systems 214

Learning Goals 214

8.1 A Different Kind of Planet 215

8.2 A Wealth of Worlds: Satellites of Ice and Rock 222

8.3 Jovian Planet Rings 232

*Exercises and Problems* 237

## 9 Asteroids, Comets, and Dwarf Planets: Their Nature, Orbits, and Impacts 240

Learning Goals 240

9.1 Classifying Small Bodies 241

9.2 Asteroids 244

9.3 Comets 248

9.4 Pluto and the Kuiper Belt 252

9.5 Cosmic Collisions: Small Bodies Versus the Planets 256

*Exercises and Problems* 262

**common misconceptions** Dodge Those Asteroids! 248

**extraordinary claims** The Death of the Dinosaurs Was Catastrophic, Not Gradual 258

## 10 Other Planetary Systems: The New Science of Distant Worlds 265

Learning Goals 265

10.1 Detecting Planets Around Other Stars 266

10.2 The Nature of Planets Around Other Stars 270

10.3 The Formation of Other Planetary Systems 279

*Exercises and Problems* 284

**cosmic context** FIGURE 10.6 Detecting Extrasolar Planets 272

**cosmic calculations 10.1** Finding Sizes of Extrasolar Planets 275

**cosmic context** PART III AT A GLANCE: Learning from Other Worlds 286

## PART IV Stars

### 11 Our Star 288

Learning Goals 288

- 11.1 A Closer Look at the Sun 289
  - 11.2 Nuclear Fusion in the Sun 293
  - 11.3 The Sun–Earth Connection 298
- Exercises and Problems* 306
- common misconceptions** The Sun Is Not on Fire 292
  - cosmic calculations** 11.1 The Ideal Gas Law 294

### 12 Surveying the Stars 309

Learning Goals 309

- 12.1 Properties of Stars 310
  - 12.2 Patterns Among Stars 318
  - 12.3 Star Clusters 326
- Exercises and Problems* 330
- cosmic calculations** 12.1 The Inverse Square Law for Light 312
  - common misconceptions** Photos of Stars 314
  - cosmic calculations** 12.2 Radius of a Star 319
  - cosmic context** FIGURE 12.10 Reading an H-R Diagram 320

### 13 Star Stuff 333

Learning Goals 333

- 13.1 Star Birth 334
  - 13.2 Life as a Low-Mass Star 340
  - 13.3 Life as a High-Mass Star 347
  - 13.4 Stars in Close Binaries 353
- Exercises and Problems* 358
- cosmic calculations** 13.1 Conditions for Star Birth 336
  - special topic** How Long Is 5 Billion Years? 346
  - cosmic context** FIGURE 13.23 Summary of Stellar Lives 354

### 14 The Bizarre Stellar Graveyard 361

Learning Goals 361

- 14.1 White Dwarfs 362
  - 14.2 Neutron Stars 367
  - 14.3 Black Holes: Gravity's Ultimate Victory 371
  - 14.4 Extreme Events 377
- Exercises and Problems* 381
- special topic** Relativity and the Cosmic Speed Limit 364
  - special topic** General Relativity and Curvature of Spacetime 373
  - cosmic calculations** 14.1 The Schwarzschild Radius 374
  - common misconceptions** Black Holes Don't Suck 375
  - extraordinary claims** Neutron Stars and Black Holes Are Real 376

**cosmic context** PART IV AT A GLANCE: Balancing Pressure and Gravity 384

## PART V Galaxies and Beyond

### 15 Our Galaxy 386

Learning Goals 386

- 15.1 The Milky Way Revealed 387
  - 15.2 Galactic Recycling 391
  - 15.3 The History of the Milky Way 401
  - 15.4 The Galactic Center 403
- Exercises and Problems* 409
- common misconceptions** The Halo of a Galaxy 388
  - special topic** How Did We Learn the Structure of the Milky Way? 388
  - special topic** How Do We Determine Stellar Orbits? 390
  - cosmic calculations** 15.1 The Orbital Velocity Formula 391
  - common misconceptions** The Sound of Space 395
  - common misconceptions** What Is a Nebula? 399
  - cosmic context** FIGURE 15.20 The Galactic Center 404

### 16 A Universe of Galaxies 411

Learning Goals 411

- 16.1 Islands of Stars 412
  - 16.2 Distances of Galaxies 417
  - 16.3 Galaxy Evolution 426
  - 16.4 The Role of Supermassive Black Holes 432
- Exercises and Problems* 439
- cosmic calculations** 16.1 Standard Candles 418
  - special topic** Who Discovered the Expanding Universe? 421
  - cosmic calculations** 16.2 Hubble's Law 422
  - common misconceptions** What Is the Universe Expanding Into? 424
  - common misconceptions** Beyond the Horizon 426

### 17 The Birth of the Universe 442

Learning Goals 442

- 17.1 The Big Bang Theory 443
  - 17.2 Evidence for the Big Bang 452
  - 17.3 The Big Bang and Inflation 456
  - 17.4 Observing the Big Bang for Yourself 459
- Exercises and Problems* 463
- cosmic context** FIGURE 17.6 The Early Universe 450
  - cosmic calculations** 17.1 Temperature of Background Radiation 454
  - extraordinary claims** The Universe Doesn't Change with Time 455

## 18 Dark Matter, Dark Energy, and the Fate of the Universe 466

Learning Goals 466

- 18.1 Unseen Influences in the Cosmos 467
- 18.2 Evidence for Dark Matter 468
- 18.3 Structure Formation 477
- 18.4 Dark Energy and the Fate of the Universe 480
  - Exercises and Problems* 491
  - cosmic calculations** 18.1 Mass-to-Light Ratio 471
  - extraordinary claims** Most of the Universe's Matter Is Dark 472
  - special topic** Einstein's Greatest Blunder 484
  - cosmic context** FIGURE 18.18 Dark Matter and Dark Energy 486
  - cosmic context** PART V AT A GLANCE: Galaxy Evolution 494

## PART VI Life on Earth and Beyond

## 19 Life in the Universe 496

Learning Goals 496

- 19.1 Life on Earth 497
- 19.2 Life in the Solar System 507
- 19.3 Life Around Other Stars 511

19.4 The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence 517

19.5 Interstellar Travel and Its Implications for Civilization 523

*Exercises and Problems* 529

**special topic** What Is Life? 502

**extraordinary claims** Aliens Are Visiting Earth in UFOs 522

**cosmic context** PART VI AT A GLANCE: A Universe of Life? 532

## Appendixes

- A Useful Numbers A-1
- B Useful Formulas A-2
- C A Few Mathematical Skills A-3
- D The Periodic Table of the Elements A-8
- E Planetary Data A-9
- F Stellar Data A-12
- G Galaxy Data A-14
- H The 88 Constellations A-17
- I Star Charts A-19
- J Key to Icons on Figures A-24

Glossary G-1

Credits C-1

Index I-1

# 1

## A Modern View of the Universe



This Hubble Space Telescope photo shows thousands of galaxies in a region of the sky so small you could cover it with a grain of sand held at arm's length.

### LEARNING GOALS

#### 1.1 The Scale of the Universe

- ◆ What is our place in the universe?
- ◆ How big is the universe?

#### 1.2 The History of the Universe

- ◆ How did we come to be?
- ◆ How do our lifetimes compare to the age of the universe?

#### 1.3 Spaceship Earth

- ◆ How is Earth moving through space?
- ◆ How do galaxies move within the universe?

## ESSENTIAL PREPARATION

1. How to Succeed in Your Astronomy Course [pp. xxii–xxiii]
2. Powers of 10 [Appendixes C.1, C.2]
3. Working with Units [Appendix C.3]
4. The Metric System (SI) [Appendix C.4]

**F**ar from city lights on a clear night, you can gaze upward at a sky filled with stars. Lie back and watch for a few hours, and you will observe the stars marching steadily across the sky. Confronted by the seemingly infinite heavens, you might wonder how Earth and the universe came to be. If you do, you will be sharing an experience common to humans around the world and in thousands of generations past.

Modern science offers answers to many of our fundamental questions about the universe and our place within it. We now know the basic content and scale of the universe. We know the ages of Earth and the universe. And, although much remains to be discovered, we are rapidly learning how the simple ingredients of the early universe developed into the incredible diversity of life on Earth—and, perhaps, of life on other worlds as well.

In this first chapter, we will survey the scale, history, and motion of the universe. This “big picture” perspective on our universe will provide a base on which you’ll be able to build a deeper understanding in the rest of the book.

## 1.1 The Scale of the Universe

For most of human history, our ancestors imagined Earth to be stationary at the center of a relatively small universe. This idea made sense at a time when understanding was built upon everyday experience. After all, we cannot feel the constant motion of Earth as it rotates on its axis and orbits the Sun, and if you observe the sky you’ll see that the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars all appear to revolve around us each day. Nevertheless, we now know that Earth is a planet orbiting a rather average star in a rather typical galaxy in a vast universe.

The historical path to this knowledge was long and complex. In later chapters, we’ll see that the ancient belief in an Earth-centered (or *geocentric*) universe changed only when people were confronted by strong evidence to the contrary, and we’ll explore how the method of learning that we call *science* enabled us to acquire this evidence. First, however, it’s useful to have a general picture of the universe as we know it today.

### ◆ What is our place in the universe?

Take a look at the remarkable photo that opens this chapter (on page 1). This photo, taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, shows a piece of the sky so small that you could block your view of it with a grain of sand held at arm’s length. Yet it covers an almost unimaginable expanse of both space and time: Nearly every object within it is a galaxy containing billions of stars, and some of the smaller smudges are galaxies so far away that their light has taken billions of years to reach us. Let’s begin our study of astronomy by exploring what a photo like this one tells us about our own place in the universe.

**Our Cosmic Address** The galaxies that we see in the Hubble Space Telescope photo make up just one of several key levels of structure in our universe, all illustrated as our “cosmic address” in Figure 1.1.

## Our Cosmic Address

**FIGURE 1.1**

Our cosmic address. These diagrams show key levels of structure in our universe; for a more detailed view, see the "You Are Here in Space" foldout diagram in the front of the book.

**Universe**

approx. size:  $10^{21}$  km  $\approx$  100 million ly

**Local Supercluster**

approx. size:  $3 \times 10^{19}$  km  $\approx$  3 million ly

**Local Group**

approx. size:  
 $10^{18}$  km  $\approx$  100,000 ly

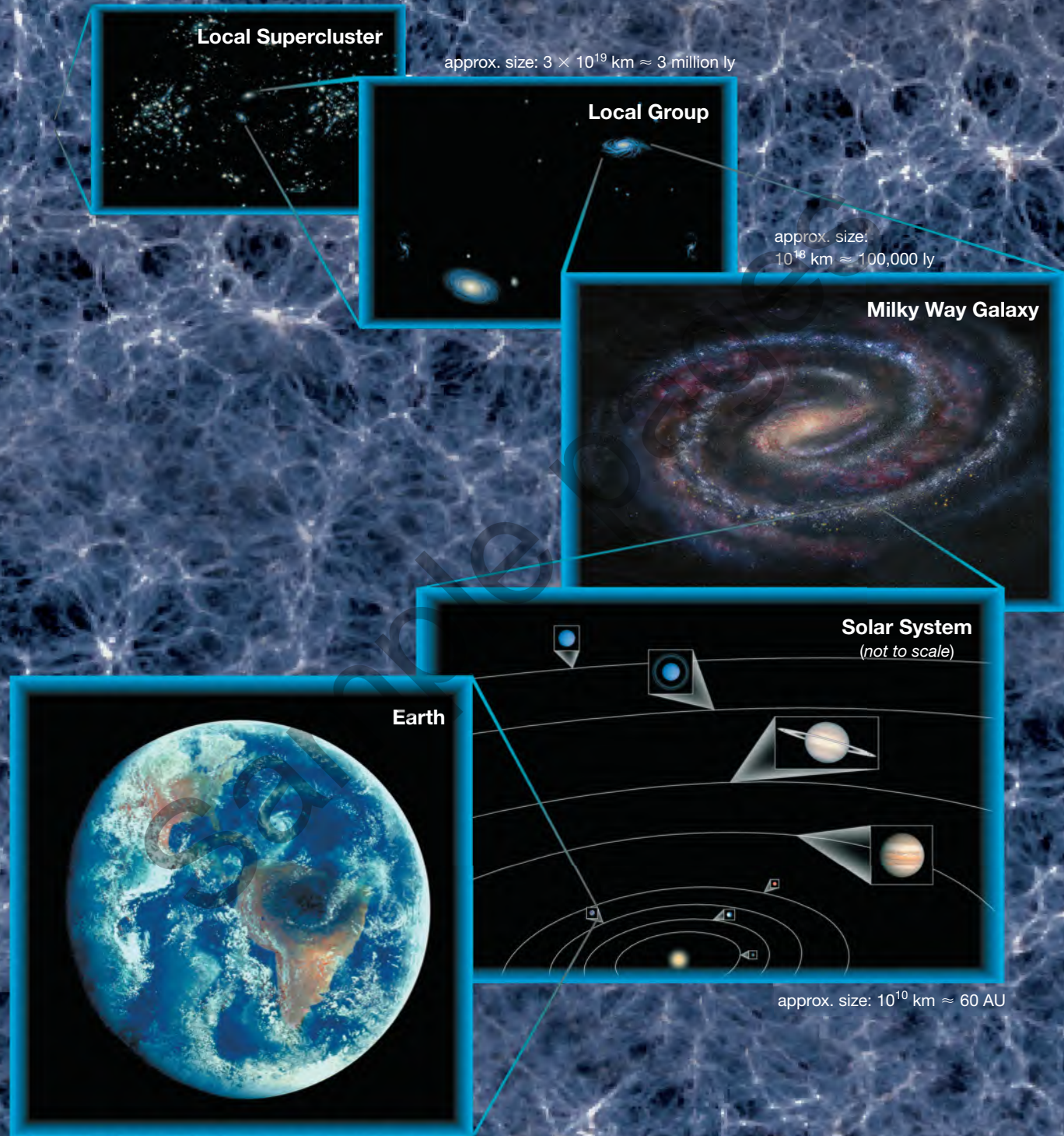
**Milky Way Galaxy**

**Solar System**  
(not to scale)

**Earth**

approx. size:  $10^{10}$  km  $\approx$  60 AU

approx. size:  $10^4$  km





## cosmic calculations 1.1

### How Far Is a Light-Year?

We can calculate the distance represented by a light-year by recalling that

$$\text{distance} = \text{speed} \times \text{time}$$

For example, at a speed of 50 km/hr, in 2 hours you travel  $50 \text{ km/hr} \times 2 \text{ hr} = 100 \text{ km}$ . To find the distance represented by 1 light-year, we multiply the speed of light by 1 year. Because we are given the speed of light in kilometers per *second* but the time as 1 *year*, we must carry out the multiplication while converting 1 year into seconds. (See Appendix C for a review of unit conversions.) The result is

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \text{ light-year} &= (\text{speed of light}) \times (1 \text{ yr}) \\ &= \left( 300,000 \frac{\text{km}}{\text{s}} \right) \times (1 \text{ yr}) \times \frac{365 \text{ days}}{1 \text{ yr}} \\ &\quad \times \frac{24 \text{ hr}}{1 \text{ day}} \times \frac{60 \text{ min}}{1 \text{ hr}} \times \frac{60 \text{ s}}{1 \text{ min}} \\ &= 9,460,000,000,000 \text{ km} \\ &= 9.46 \text{ trillion km} \end{aligned}$$

That is, 1 light-year is about 9.46 trillion kilometers, which we can approximate as 10 trillion kilometers. This can be easier to write with powers of 10 (see Appendix C.1 for a review); recall that 1 trillion is a 1 followed by 12 zeros, or  $10^{12}$ , so 10 trillion can be written as  $10^{13}$ .

Earth is a planet in our **solar system**, which consists of the Sun, the planets and their moons, and countless smaller objects that include rocky *asteroids* and icy *comets*. Keep in mind that our Sun is a *star*, just like the stars we see in our night sky.

Our solar system belongs to the huge, disk-shaped collection of stars called the **Milky Way Galaxy**. A **galaxy** is a great island of stars in space, all held together by gravity and orbiting a common center. The Milky Way is a relatively large galaxy, containing more than 100 billion stars, and many of these stars are orbited by planets. Our solar system is located a little over halfway from the galactic center to the edge of the galactic disk.

Billions of other galaxies are scattered throughout space. Some galaxies are fairly isolated, but most are found in groups. Our Milky Way, for example, is one of the two

**We live on one planet orbiting one star among more than 100 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, which in turn is one of billions of galaxies in the universe.**

largest among more than 70 galaxies (most relatively small) in the

**Local Group**. Groups of galaxies with many more large members are often called **galaxy clusters**.

On a very large scale, galaxies and galaxy clusters appear to be arranged in giant chains and sheets with huge voids between them; the background of Figure 1.1 represents this large-scale structure. The regions in which galaxies and galaxy clusters are most tightly packed are called **superclusters**, which are essentially clusters of galaxy clusters. Our Local Group is located in the outskirts of the Local Supercluster (which was recently named *Laniakea*, Hawaiian for “immense heaven”).

Together, all these structures make up our **universe**. In other words, the universe is the sum total of all matter and energy, encompassing the superclusters and voids and everything within them.

### think about it

Some people think that our tiny physical size in the vast universe makes us insignificant. Others think that our ability to learn about the wonders of the universe gives us significance despite our small size. What do you think?

### Astronomical Distance Measurements

The labels in Figure 1.1 give approximate sizes for the various structures in kilometers (recall that 1 kilometer  $\approx$  0.6 mile), but many distances in astronomy are so large that kilometers are not the most convenient unit. Instead, we often use two other units:

- One **astronomical unit (AU)** is Earth’s average distance from the Sun, which is about 150 million kilometers (93 million miles). We commonly describe distances within our solar system in AU.
- One **light-year (ly)** is the distance that light can travel in 1 year, which is about 10 trillion kilometers (6 trillion miles). We generally use light-years to describe the distances of stars and galaxies.

Be sure to note that a light-year is a unit of *distance*, not of time. Light travels at the speed of light, which is about 300,000 kilometers per second. We therefore say that one *light-second* is about 300,000 kilometers, because that is the distance light travels in 1 second. Similarly, one light-minute is the distance that light travels in 1 minute, one light-hour is the distance that light travels in 1 hour, and so on. Cosmic Calculations 1.1 shows that light travels about 10 trillion kilometers in 1 year, so that distance represents a light-year.

### Looking Back in Time

The speed of light is extremely fast by earthly standards. It is so fast that if you could make light go in circles, it could circle Earth nearly eight times in a single second. Nevertheless, even light

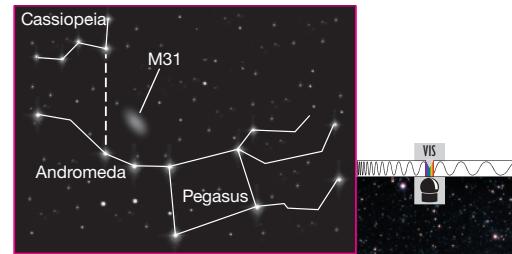
takes time to travel the vast distances in space. Light takes a little more than 1 second to reach Earth from the Moon, and about 8 minutes to reach Earth from the Sun. Stars are so far away that their light takes years to reach us, which is why we measure their distances in light-years.

Because light takes time to travel through space, we are led to a remarkable fact: **The farther away we look in distance, the further back we look in time.** For example, the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius, is about 8 light-years away, which means its light takes about 8 years to reach us. When we look at Sirius, we are seeing it not as it is today but as it was about 8 years ago.

**Light takes time to travel the vast distances in space. When we look deep into space, we also look far into the past.**

The effect is more dramatic at greater distances. The Andromeda Galaxy (Figure 1.2) lies about 2.5 million light-years from Earth, which means we see it as it looked about 2.5 million years ago. We see more distant galaxies as they were even further in the past. Some of the galaxies in the Hubble Space Telescope photo that opens the chapter are more than 12 billion light-years away, meaning we see them as they were more than 12 billion years ago.

It's also amazing to realize that any "snapshot" of a distant galaxy is a picture of both space and time. For example, because the Andromeda Galaxy is about 100,000 light-years in diameter, the light we see from the far side of the galaxy must have left on its journey to us 100,000 years



**▲ FIGURE 1.2** The Andromeda Galaxy (M31). When we look at this galaxy, we see light that has been traveling through space for 2.5 million years. The inset shows the galaxy's location in the constellation Andromeda.

## Basic Astronomical Definitions

### Basic Astronomical Objects

**star** A large, glowing ball of gas that generates heat and light through nuclear fusion in its core. Our Sun is a star.

**planet** A moderately large object that orbits a star and shines primarily by reflecting light from its star. According to the current definition, an object can be considered a planet only if it (1) orbits a star, (2) is large enough for its own gravity to make it round, and (3) has cleared most other objects from its orbital path. An object that meets the first two criteria but has not cleared its orbital path, like Pluto, is designated a **dwarf planet**.

**moon (or satellite)** An object that orbits a planet. The term *satellite* is also used more generally to refer to any object orbiting another object.

**asteroid** A relatively small and rocky object that orbits a star.

**comet** A relatively small and ice-rich object that orbits a star.

**small solar system body** An asteroid, comet, or other object that orbits a star but is too small to qualify as a planet or dwarf planet.

### Collections of Astronomical Objects

**solar system** The Sun and all the material that orbits it, including planets, dwarf planets, and small solar system bodies. Although the term *solar system* technically refers only to our own star system (*solar* means "of the Sun"), it is often applied to other star systems as well.

**star system** A star (sometimes more than one star) and any planets and other materials that orbit it.

**galaxy** A great island of stars in space, all held together by gravity and orbiting a common center, with a total mass equivalent to that of millions, billions, or even trillions of stars.

**cluster (or group) of galaxies** A collection of galaxies bound together by gravity. Small collections of galaxies are generally called *groups*, while larger collections are called *clusters*.

**supercluster** A gigantic region of space in which many groups and clusters of galaxies are packed more closely together than elsewhere in the universe.

**universe (or cosmos)** The sum total of all matter and energy—that is, all galaxies and everything between them.

**observable universe** The portion of the entire universe that can be seen from Earth, at least in principle. The observable universe is probably only a tiny portion of the entire universe.

### Astronomical Distance Units

**astronomical unit (AU)** The average distance between Earth and the Sun, which is about 150 million kilometers. More technically, 1 AU is the length of the semimajor axis of Earth's orbit.

**light-year** The distance that light can travel in 1 year, which is about 10 trillion kilometers (more precisely, 9.46 trillion km).

### Terms Relating to Motion

**rotation** The spinning of an object around its axis. For example, Earth rotates once each day around its axis, which is an imaginary line connecting the North and South Poles.

**orbit (revolution)** The orbital motion of one object around another due to gravity. For example, Earth orbits the Sun once each year.

**expansion (of the universe)** The increase in the average distance between galaxies as time progresses.

## common misconceptions

### The Meaning of a Light-Year

You've probably heard people say things like "It will take me light-years to finish this homework!" But a statement like this one doesn't make sense, because a light-year is a unit of *distance*, not time. If you are unsure whether the term *light-year* is being used correctly, try testing the statement by using the fact that 1 light-year is about 10 trillion kilometers, or 6 trillion miles. The statement then reads "It will take me 6 trillion miles to finish this homework," which clearly does not make sense.

before the light from the near side. Figure 1.2 therefore shows different parts of the galaxy spread over a time period of 100,000 years. When we study the universe, it is impossible to separate space and time.

**see it for yourself** The central region of the Andromeda Galaxy is faintly visible to the naked eye and easy to see with binoculars. Use a star chart to find it in the night sky and remember that you are seeing light that spent 2.5 million years in space before reaching your eyes. If students on a planet in the Andromeda Galaxy were looking at the Milky Way, what would they see? Could they know that we exist here on Earth?

**The Observable Universe** As we'll discuss in Section 1.2, the measured age of the universe is about 14 billion years. This fact, combined with the fact that looking deep into space means looking far back in time, places a limit on the portion of the universe that we can see, even in principle.

Figure 1.3 shows the idea. If we look at a galaxy that is 7 billion light-years away, we see it as it looked 7 billion years ago\*—which means we see it as it was when the universe was half its current age. If we look at a galaxy that is 12 billion light-years away (like the most distant ones in the Hubble Space Telescope photo), we see it as it was 12 billion years ago, when the universe was only 2 billion years old.

If we tried to look beyond 14 billion light-years, we'd be looking to a time more than 14 billion years ago—which is before the universe existed and therefore means that there is nothing to see. This distance of 14 billion light-years therefore marks the boundary (or *horizon*) of our **observable universe**—the portion of the entire universe that we can potentially observe. Note that this fact does not put any limit on the size of the *entire* universe, which we assume to be far larger than our observable universe. We simply cannot see or study anything beyond the bounds of our observable universe, because the light from such distances has not yet had time to reach us in a 14-billion-year-old universe.

### ▼ FIGURE 1.3

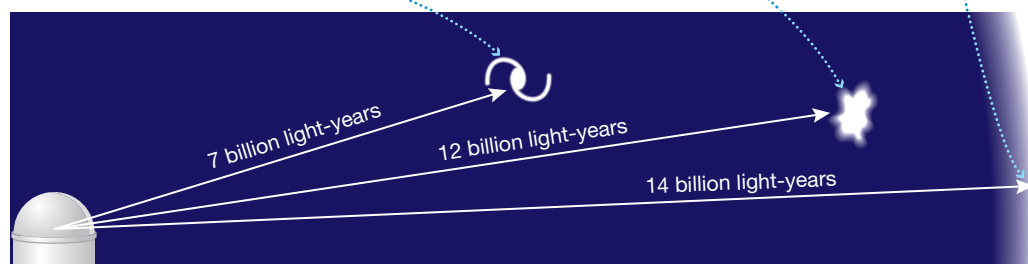
The farther away we look in space, the further back we look in time. The age of the universe therefore puts a limit on the size of the observable universe—the portion of the entire universe that we could observe in principle.

\*As we'll see in Chapter 16, distances to faraway galaxies must be defined carefully in an expanding universe; in this book, we use distances based on the light-travel time from a distant object (called the *lookback time*).

**Far:** We see a galaxy 7 billion light-years away as it was 7 billion years ago—when the universe was about half its current age of 14 billion years.

**Farther:** We see a galaxy 12 billion light-years away as it was 12 billion years ago—when the universe was only about 2 billion years old.

**The limit of our observable universe:** Light from nearly 14 billion light-years away shows the universe as it looked shortly after the Big Bang, before galaxies existed.



**Beyond the observable universe:** We cannot see anything farther than 14 billion light-years away, because its light has not had enough time to reach us.

## ◆ How big is the universe?

Figure 1.1 put numbers on the sizes of different structures in the universe, but these numbers have little meaning for most people—after all, they are literally astronomical. To help you develop a greater appreciation of our modern view of the universe, we'll discuss a few ways of putting these numbers into perspective.

**The Scale of the Solar System** One of the best ways to develop perspective on cosmic sizes and distances is to imagine our solar system shrunk down to a scale that would allow you to walk through it. The Voyage scale model solar system (Figure 1.4) makes such a walk possible by showing the Sun, the planets, and the distances between them at *one ten-billionth* of their actual sizes and distances.

Figure 1.5a shows the Sun and planets at their correct sizes (but not distances) on the Voyage scale. The model Sun is about the size of a large grapefruit, Jupiter is about the size of a marble, and Earth is about the size of the ballpoint in a pen. You can

**On a scale in which the Sun is the size of a grapefruit, Earth is the size of a ballpoint from a pen, orbiting the Sun at a distance of 15 meters.**

immediately see some key facts about our solar system. For example, the Sun is far larger than any of the planets; in mass, the Sun outweighs all the planets combined by a factor of nearly 1000. The planets also vary considerably in size: The storm on Jupiter known as the Great Red Spot (visible near Jupiter's lower left in the painting) could swallow up the entire Earth.

The scale of the solar system is even more remarkable when you combine the sizes shown in Figure 1.5a with the distances illustrated by the map of the Voyage model in Figure 1.5b. For example, the ballpoint-size Earth is located about 15 meters (16.5 yards) from the grapefruit-size Sun, which means you can picture Earth's orbit as a circle of radius 15 meters around a grapefruit.

Perhaps the most striking feature of our solar system when we view it to scale is its emptiness. The Voyage model shows the planets along a straight path, so we'd need to draw each planet's orbit around the model Sun to show the full extent of our planetary system. Fitting all these orbits would require an area measuring more than a kilometer on a side—an area equivalent to more than 300 football fields arranged in a grid. Spread over this large area, only the grapefruit-size Sun, the planets,



▲ **FIGURE 1.4**

This photo shows the pedestals housing the Sun (the gold sphere on the nearest pedestal) and the inner planets in the Voyage scale model solar system (Washington, D.C.). The model planets are encased in the sidewalk-facing disks visible at about eye level on the planet pedestals. To the left is the National Air and Space Museum.

### special topic How Many Planets Are in Our Solar System?

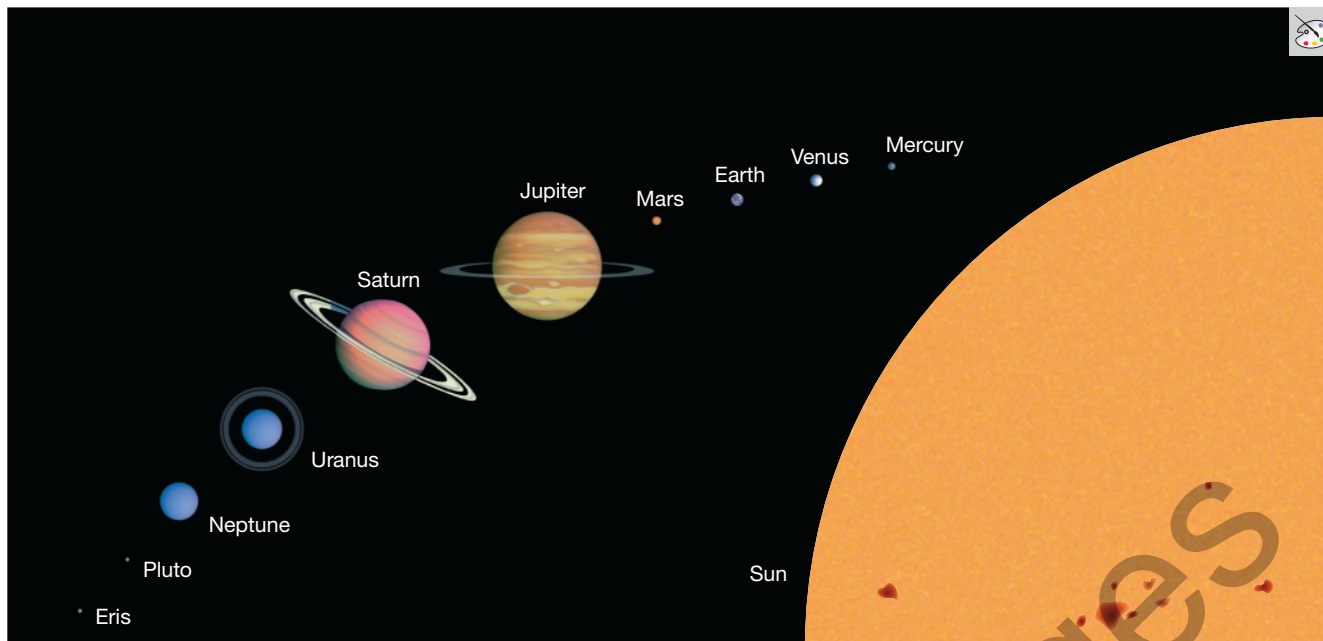
Until recently, children were taught that our solar system had nine planets. However, in 2006 astronomers voted to demote Pluto to a *dwarf planet*, leaving our solar system with only eight official planets. Why the change?

When Pluto was discovered in 1930, it was assumed to be similar to other planets. But as we'll discuss in Chapter 9, we now know that Pluto is much smaller than any of the first eight planets and that it shares the outer solar system with thousands of other icy objects. Still, as long as Pluto was the largest known of these objects, most astronomers were content to leave the planetary status quo. Change was forced by the 2005 discovery of an object called Eris. Because Eris is slightly larger in mass than Pluto, astronomers could no longer avoid the question of what objects should count as planets.

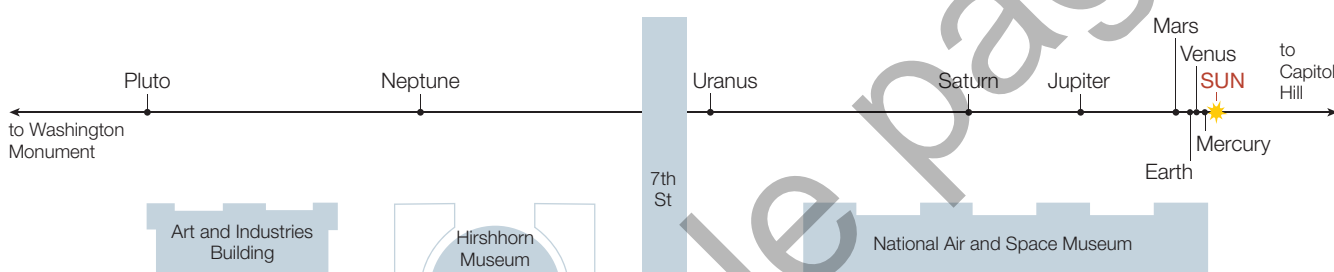
Official decisions on astronomical names and definitions rest with the International Astronomical Union (IAU), an organization

made up of professional astronomers from around the world. In 2006, an IAU vote defined “planet” in a way that left out Pluto and Eris (see Basic Astronomical Definitions on page 5) but added the “dwarf planet” category to accommodate them. Three smaller solar system objects are also now considered dwarf planets (the asteroid Ceres and the Kuiper belt objects Make-make and Haumea). More than a half dozen other objects are still being studied to determine if they meet the dwarf planet definition.

Some astronomers object to these definitions, which may yet be revisited. Pluto and other objects will remain the same either way. Indeed, much as there are no well-defined distinctions between the flowing waterways that we call creeks, streams, or rivers, this case offers a good example of the difference between the fuzzy boundaries of nature and the human preference for categories.



a The scaled sizes (but not distances) of the Sun, the planets, and the two largest known dwarf planets.



b Locations of the major objects in the Voyage model (Washington, D.C.); the distance from the Sun to Pluto is about 600 meters (1/3 mile). Planets are lined up in the model, but in reality each planet orbits the Sun independently and a perfect alignment never occurs.

### ▲ FIGURE 1.5

The Voyage scale model represents the solar system at one *ten-billionth* of its actual size. Pluto is included in the Voyage model for context.

## common misconceptions

### Confusing Very Different Things

Most people are familiar with the terms *solar system* and *galaxy*, but few realize how incredibly different they are. Our solar system is a single star system, while our galaxy is a collection of more than 100 billion star systems—so many that it would take thousands of years just to count them. Moreover, if you look at the sizes in Figure 1.1, you'll see that our galaxy is about 100 million times larger in diameter than our solar system. So be careful; numerically speaking, mixing up *solar system* and *galaxy* is a gigantic mistake!

and a few moons would be big enough to see. The rest of it would look virtually empty (that's why we call it *space!*).

Seeing our solar system to scale also helps put space exploration into perspective. The Moon, the only other world on which humans have ever stepped (Figure 1.6), lies only about 4 centimeters (1½ inches) from Earth in the Voyage model. On this scale, the palm of your hand can cover the entire region of the universe in which humans have so far traveled. The trip to Mars is more than 150 times as far as the trip to the Moon, even when Mars is on the same side of its orbit as Earth. And while you can walk from Earth to Pluto in a few minutes on the Voyage scale, the *New Horizons* spacecraft, which flew past Pluto in 2015, took more than 9 years to make the real journey, despite traveling at a speed nearly 100 times as fast as that of a commercial jet.

**Distances to the Stars** If you visit the Voyage model in Washington, D.C., you can walk the roughly 600-meter distance from the Sun to Pluto in just a few minutes. How much farther would you have to walk to reach the next star on this scale?

Amazingly, you would need to walk to California. If this answer seems hard to believe, you can check it for yourself. A light-year is about 10 trillion kilometers, which becomes 1000 kilometers on the 1-to-10-billion scale (because  $10 \text{ trillion} \div 10 \text{ billion} = 1000$ ). The nearest star

**On the same scale on which Pluto is a few minutes' walk from Earth, you'd have to walk across the United States to reach the nearest stars.**

is about 4400 kilometers (2700 miles) on the 1-to-10-billion scale, or roughly equivalent to the distance across the United States.

The tremendous distances to the stars give us some perspective on the technological challenge of astronomy. For example, because the largest star of the Alpha Centauri system is roughly the same size and brightness as our Sun, viewing it in the night sky is somewhat like being in Washington, D.C., and seeing a very bright grapefruit in San Francisco (neglecting the problems introduced by the curvature of Earth). It may seem remarkable that we can see the star at all, but the blackness of the night sky allows the naked eye to see it as a faint dot of light. It looks much brighter through powerful telescopes, but we still cannot see features of the star's surface.

Now, consider the difficulty of detecting *planets* orbiting nearby stars, which is equivalent to looking from Washington, D.C., and trying to find ballpoints or marbles orbiting grapefruits in California or beyond. When you consider this challenge, it is all the more remarkable to realize that we now have technology capable of finding such planets [Section 10.11].

The vast distances to the stars also offer a sobering lesson about interstellar travel. Although science fiction shows like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* make such travel look easy, the reality is far different. Consider the *Voyager 2* spacecraft. Launched in 1977, *Voyager 2* flew by Jupiter in 1979, Saturn in 1981, Uranus in 1986, and Neptune in 1989. It is now bound for the stars at a speed of close to 50,000 kilometers per hour—about 100 times as fast as a speeding bullet. But even at this speed, *Voyager 2* would take about 100,000 years to reach Alpha Centauri if it were headed in that direction (which it's not). Convenient interstellar travel remains well beyond our present technology.

**The Size of the Milky Way Galaxy** The vast separation between our solar system and Alpha Centauri is typical of the separations between star systems in our region of the Milky Way Galaxy. We therefore cannot use the 1-to-10-billion scale for thinking about distances beyond the nearest stars, because more distant stars would not fit on Earth with this scale. To visualize the galaxy, let's reduce our scale by another factor of 1 billion (making it a scale of 1 to  $10^{19}$ ).

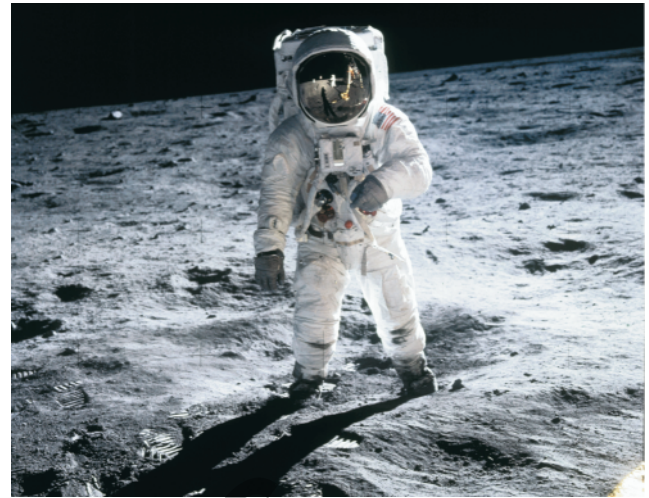
On this new scale, each light-year becomes 1 millimeter, and the 100,000-light-year diameter of the Milky Way Galaxy becomes 100 meters, or about the length of a football field. Visualize a football field with a scale model of our galaxy centered over midfield. Our entire solar system is a microscopic dot located around the 20-yard line. The 4.4-light-year separation between our solar system and Alpha Centauri becomes just 4.4 millimeters on this scale—smaller than the width of your little finger. If you stood at the position of our solar system in this model, millions of star systems would lie within reach of your arms.

Another way to put the galaxy into perspective is to consider its number of stars—more than 100 billion. Imagine that tonight you are having difficulty falling asleep (perhaps because you are contemplating the scale of the universe). Instead of counting sheep, you decide to count stars. If you are able to count about one star each second, how long would it take you to count 100 billion stars in the Milky Way? Clearly, the answer is 100 billion ( $10^{11}$ ) seconds, but how long is that?

Amazingly, 100 billion seconds is more than 3000 years. (You can confirm this by dividing 100 billion by the number of seconds in 1 year.) You

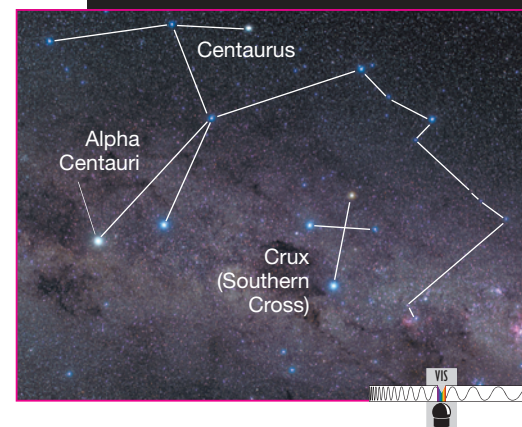
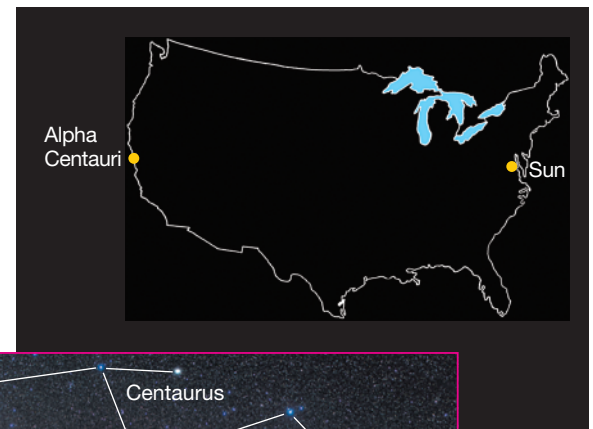
system to our own, a three-star system called Alpha Centauri (Figure 1.7), is about 4.4 light-years away. That distance

is about 4400 kilometers (2700 miles) on the 1-to-10-billion scale, or roughly equivalent to the distance across the United States.



▲ **FIGURE 1.6**

This famous photograph from the first Moon landing (*Apollo 11* in July 1969) shows astronaut Buzz Aldrin, with Neil Armstrong reflected in his visor. Armstrong was the first to step onto the Moon's surface, saying, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."



▲ **FIGURE 1.7**

On the same 1-to-10-billion scale on which you can walk from the Sun to Pluto in just a few minutes, you'd need to cross the United States to reach Alpha Centauri, the nearest other star system. The inset shows the location and appearance of Alpha Centauri in the night sky.



▲ **FIGURE 1.8**

The number of stars in the observable universe is comparable to the number of grains of dry sand on all the beaches on Earth.

**It would take thousands of years just to count out loud the number of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy.** would need thousands of years just to *count* the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, and this assumes you never take a break—no sleeping, no eating, and absolutely no dying!

**The Observable Universe** As incredible as the scale of our galaxy may seem, the Milky Way is only one of roughly 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. Just as it would take thousands of years to count the stars in the Milky Way, it would take thousands of years to count all the galaxies.

Think for a moment about the total number of stars in all these galaxies. If we assume 100 billion stars per galaxy, the total number of stars in the observable universe is roughly 100 billion  $\times$  100 billion, or 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 ( $10^{22}$ ).

How big is this number? Visit a beach. Run your hands through the fine-grained sand. Imagine counting each tiny grain of sand as it slips through your fingers. Then imagine counting every grain of sand on the beach and continuing to count *every* grain of dry sand on *every* beach on Earth. If you could actually complete this task, you would find that the number of grains of sand is comparable to the number of stars in the observable universe (Figure 1.8).

**Roughly speaking, there are as many stars in the observable universe as there are grains of sand on all the beaches on Earth.**

**think about it**

Contemplate the incredible numbers of stars in our galaxy and in the universe, and the fact that each star is a potential sun for a system of planets. How does this perspective affect your thoughts about the possibilities for finding life—or intelligent life—beyond Earth? Explain.

## 1.2 The History of the Universe

Our universe is vast not only in space, but also in time. In this section, we will briefly discuss the history of the universe as we understand it today.

Before we begin, you may wonder how we can claim to know anything about what the universe was like in the distant past. We'll devote much of this textbook to understanding how science enables us to do this, but you already know part of the answer: Because looking farther into space means looking further back in time, we can actually *see* parts of the universe as they were long ago, simply by looking far enough away. In other words, telescopes are somewhat like time machines, enabling us to observe the history of the universe.

### ◆ How did we come to be?

Figure 1.9 (pp. 12–13) summarizes the history of the universe according to modern science. Let's start at the upper left of the figure, and discuss the key events and what they mean.

**The Big Bang, Expansion, and the Age of the Universe** Telescopic observations of distant galaxies show that the entire universe is *expanding*, meaning that average distances between galaxies are increasing with time. This fact implies that galaxies must have been closer together in the past, and if we go back far enough, we must reach the point at which the expansion began. We call this beginning the **Big Bang**, and

**The rate at which galaxies are moving apart suggests that the universe was born about 14 billion years ago, in the event we call the Big Bang.**

scientists use the observed rate of expansion to calculate that it occurred about 14 billion years ago. The

three cubes in the upper left portion of Figure 1.9 represent the expansion of a small piece of the universe through time.

The universe as a whole has continued to expand ever since the Big Bang, but on smaller size scales, the force of gravity has drawn matter together. Structures such as galaxies and galaxy clusters occupy regions where gravity has won out against the overall expansion. That is, while the universe as a whole continues to expand, individual galaxies and galaxy clusters (and objects within them such as stars and planets) do *not* expand. This idea is also illustrated by the three cubes in Figure 1.9. Notice that as the cube as a whole grew larger, the matter within it clumped into galaxies and galaxy clusters. Most galaxies, including our own Milky Way, formed within a few billion years after the Big Bang.

### **Stellar Lives and Galactic Recycling**

Within galaxies like the Milky Way, gravity drives the collapse of clouds of gas and dust to form stars and planets. Stars are not living organisms, but they nonetheless go through “life cycles.” A star is born when gravity compresses the material in a cloud to the point at which the center becomes dense enough and

**Stars are born in interstellar clouds, produce energy and new elements through nuclear fusion, and release those new elements in interstellar space when they die.**

hot enough to generate energy by **nuclear fusion**, the process in which lightweight atomic nuclei smash together and stick (or fuse) to make heavier nuclei. The star “lives” as long as it can generate energy from fusion and “dies” when it exhausts its usable fuel.

In its final death throes, a star blows much of its content back out into space. The most massive stars die in titanic explosions called *supernovae*. The returned matter mixes with other matter floating between the stars in the galaxy, eventually becoming part of new clouds of gas and dust from which future generations of stars can be born. Galaxies therefore function as cosmic recycling plants, recycling material expelled from dying stars into new generations of stars and planets. This cycle is illustrated in the lower right of Figure 1.9. Our own solar system is a product of many generations of such recycling.

### **Star Stuff**

The recycling of stellar material is connected to our existence in an even deeper way. By studying stars of different ages, we have learned that the early universe contained only the simplest chemical elements:

**We are “star stuff”—made of material that was manufactured in stars from the simple elements born in the Big Bang.**

hydrogen and helium (and a trace of lithium). We and Earth are made primarily of other elements, such as carbon,

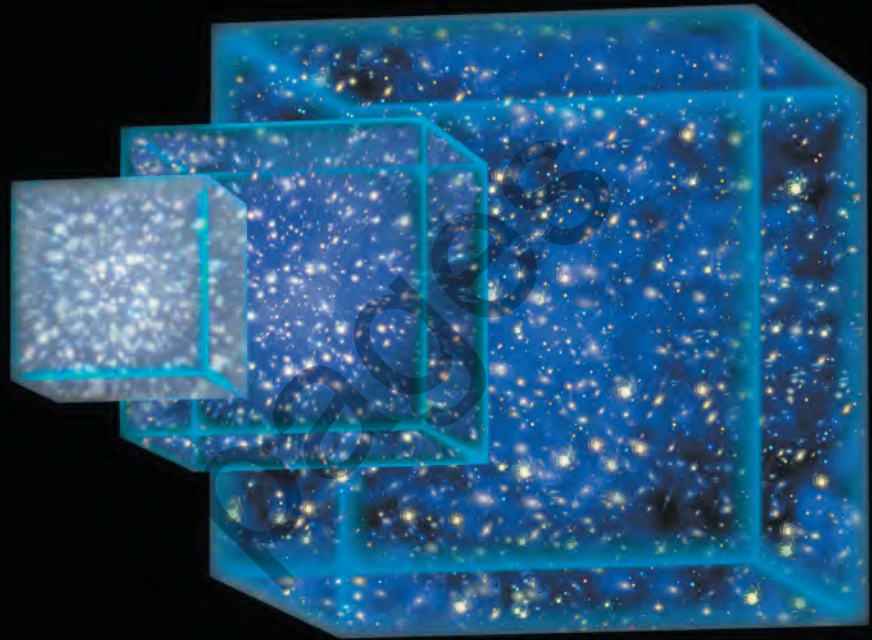
nitrogen, oxygen, and iron. Where did these other elements come from? Evidence shows that they were manufactured by stars, some through the nuclear fusion that makes stars shine, and others through nuclear reactions accompanying the explosions that end stellar lives.

By the time our solar system formed, about 4½ billion years ago, earlier generations of stars had already converted up to 2% of our galaxy’s original hydrogen and helium into heavier elements. Therefore, the cloud that gave birth to our solar system was made of roughly 98% hydrogen and helium and 2% other elements. This 2% may sound small, but it was more than enough to make the small rocky planets of



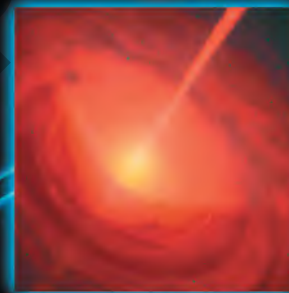
Throughout this book we will see that human life is intimately connected with the development of the universe as a whole. This illustration presents an overview of our cosmic origins, showing some of the crucial steps that made our existence possible.

- 1 **Birth of the Universe:** The expansion of the universe began with the hot and dense Big Bang. The cubes show how one region of the universe has expanded with time. The universe continues to expand, but on smaller scales gravity has pulled matter together to make galaxies.



- 4 **Earth and Life:** By the time our solar system was born,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  billion years ago, about 2% of the original hydrogen and helium had been converted into heavier elements. We are therefore “star stuff,” because we and our planet are made from elements manufactured in stars that lived and died long ago.

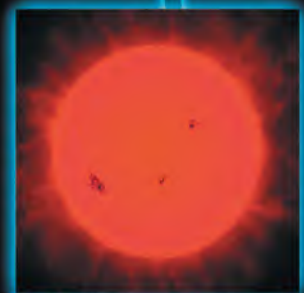
- 2 **Galaxies as Cosmic Recycling Plants:** The early universe contained only two chemical elements: hydrogen and helium. All other elements were made by stars and recycled from one stellar generation to the next within galaxies like our Milky Way.



*Stars are born in clouds of gas and dust; planets may form in surrounding disks.*



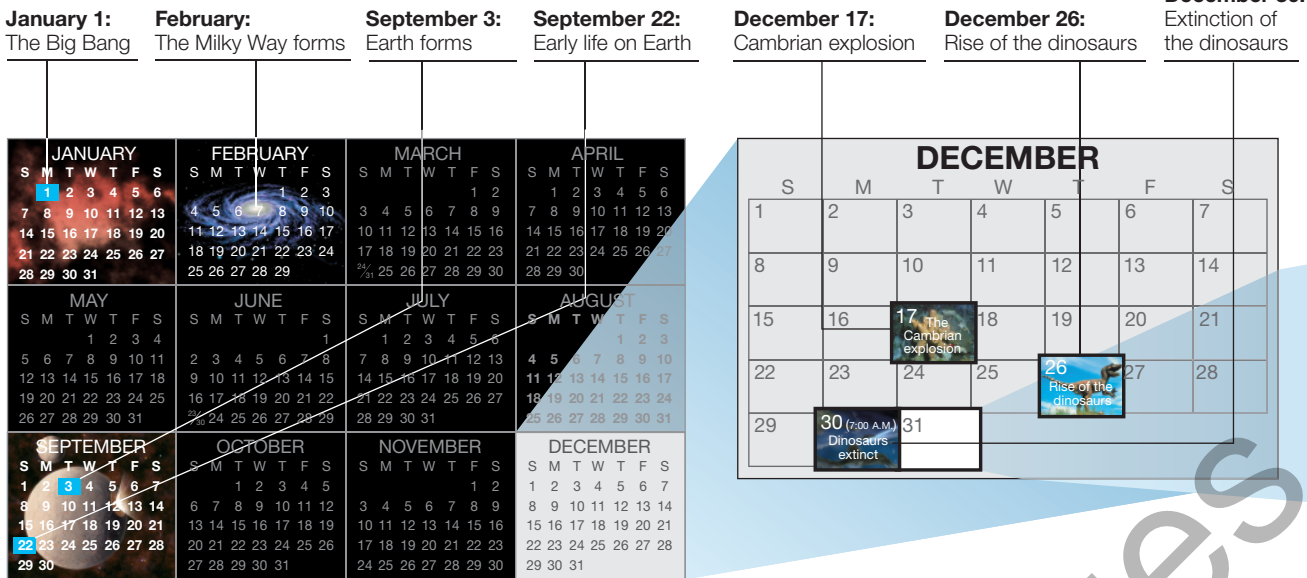
*Massive stars explode when they die, scattering the elements they've produced into space.*



*Stars shine with energy released by nuclear fusion, which ultimately manufactures all elements heavier than hydrogen and helium.*

- 3 **Life Cycles of Stars:** Many generations of stars have lived and died in the Milky Way.

## THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE IN 1 YEAR



▲ **FIGURE 1.10**

The cosmic calendar compresses the 14-billion-year history of the universe into 1 year, so that each month represents a little more than 1 billion years. *Adapted from the cosmic calendar created by Carl Sagan.* (For a more detailed version, see the “You Are Here in Time” foldout diagram in the front of the book.)

our solar system, including Earth. On Earth, some of these elements became the raw ingredients of life, which ultimately blossomed into the great diversity of life on Earth today.

In summary, most of the material from which we and our planet are made was created inside stars that lived and died before the birth of our Sun. As astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–1996) said, we are “star stuff.”

### ◆ How do our lifetimes compare to the age of the universe?

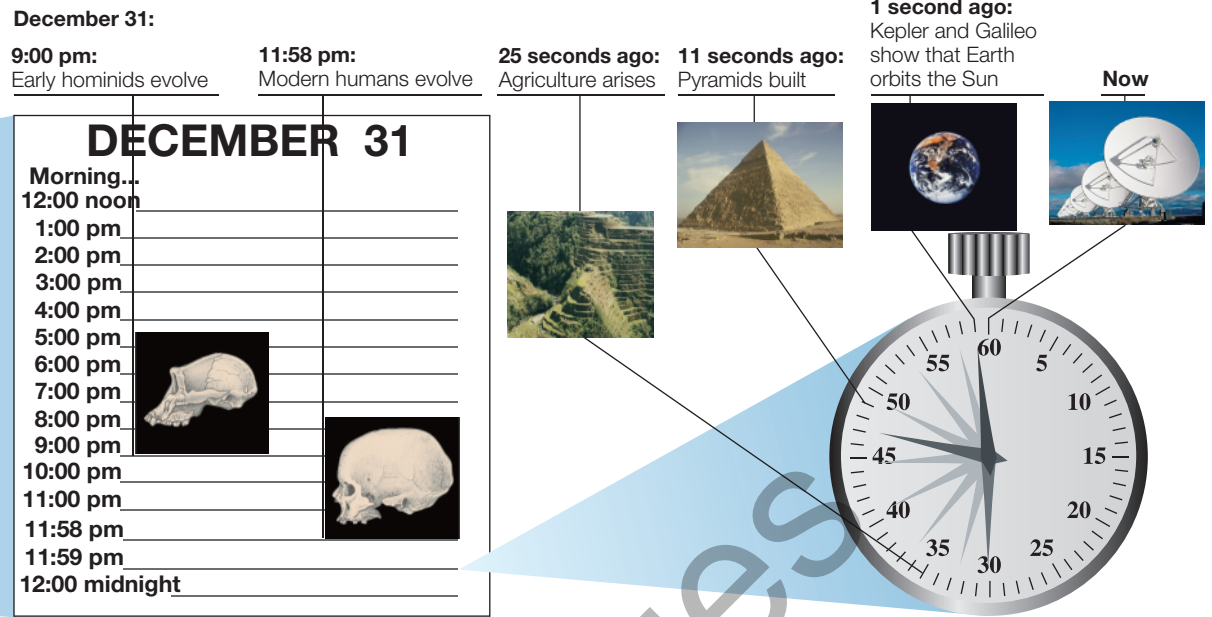
We can put the 14-billion-year age of the universe into perspective by imagining this time compressed into a single year, so each month represents a little more than 1 billion years. On this *cosmic calendar*, the Big Bang occurred at the first instant of January 1 and the present is the stroke of midnight on December 31 (Figure 1.10).

On this time scale, the Milky Way Galaxy probably formed in February. Many generations of stars lived and died in the subsequent cosmic months, enriching the galaxy with the “star stuff” from which we and our planet are made.

Our solar system and our planet did not form until early September on this scale, or  $4\frac{1}{2}$  billion years ago in real time. By late September, life on Earth was flourishing. However, for most of Earth’s history, living organisms remained relatively primitive and microscopic. On the scale of the cosmic calendar, recognizable animals became prominent only in mid-December. Early dinosaurs appeared on the day after Christmas. Then, in a cosmic instant, the dinosaurs disappeared forever—probably because of the impact of an asteroid or a comet [Section 9.5].

**If we imagine the 14-billion-year history of the universe compressed into 1 year, a human lifetime lasts only a fraction of a second.**

In real time, the death of the dinosaurs occurred some 65 million years ago, but on the cosmic calendar it was only yesterday. With the dinosaurs gone, small furry mammals inherited Earth. Some 60 million years later, or around 9 p.m. on December 31 of the cosmic calendar, early hominids (human ancestors) began to walk upright.



Perhaps the most astonishing fact about the cosmic calendar is that the entire history of human civilization falls into just the last half-minute. The ancient Egyptians built the pyramids only about 11 seconds ago on this scale. About 1 second ago, Kepler and Galileo provided the key evidence that led us to understand that Earth orbits the Sun rather than vice versa. The average college student was born about 0.05 second ago, around 11:59:59.95 p.m. on the cosmic calendar. On the scale of cosmic time, the human species is the youngest of infants, and a human lifetime is a mere blink of an eye.

**think about it** Study the more detailed cosmic calendar found on the foldout in the front of this book. How does an understanding of the scale of time affect your view of human civilization? Explain.

### 1.3 Spaceship Earth

Wherever you are as you read this book, you probably have the feeling that you're "just sitting here." Nothing could be further from the truth. As we'll discuss in this section, all of us are moving through space in so many ways that noted inventor and philosopher R. Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) described us as travelers on *spaceship Earth*.

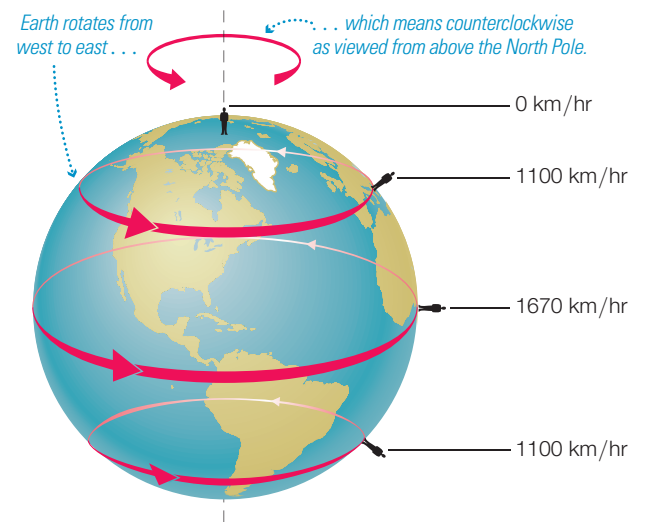
#### ◆ How is Earth moving through space?

**Rotation and Orbit** The most basic motions of Earth are its daily **rotation** (spin) and its yearly **orbit** (or *revolution*) around the Sun.

Earth rotates once each day around its axis (Figure 1.11), which is the imaginary line connecting the North Pole to the South Pole. Earth rotates

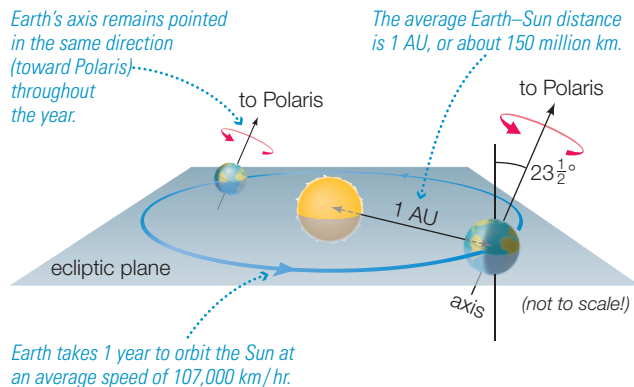
**Earth rotates once each day and orbits the Sun once each year. Its average orbital distance, called an *astronomical unit (AU)*, is about 150 million kilometers.**

from west to east—counterclockwise as viewed from above the North Pole—which is why the Sun and stars appear to rise in the east and set in the west each day. Although the physical effects of rotation



▲ **FIGURE 1.11**

As Earth rotates, your speed around Earth's axis depends on your location: The closer you are to the equator, the faster you travel with rotation.



▲ **FIGURE 1.12**

Earth takes a year to complete an orbit of the Sun, but its orbital speed is still surprisingly fast. Notice that Earth both rotates and orbits counterclockwise as viewed from above the North Pole.

are so subtle that our ancestors assumed the heavens revolved around us, the rotation speed is substantial: Unless you live quite far north or south, you are whirling around Earth's axis at a speed of more than 1000 kilometers per hour (600 miles per hour)—faster than most airplanes travel.

At the same time as it is rotating, Earth also orbits the Sun, completing one orbit each year (Figure 1.12). Earth's orbital distance varies slightly over the course of each year, but as we discussed earlier, the average distance is one astronomical unit (AU), which is about 150 million kilometers. Again, even though we don't feel this motion, the speed is impressive: We are racing around the Sun at a speed in excess of 100,000 kilometers per hour (60,000 miles per hour), which is faster than any spacecraft yet launched.

As you study Figure 1.12, notice that Earth's orbital path defines a flat plane that we call the **ecliptic plane**. Earth's axis is tilted by  $23\frac{1}{2}^\circ$  from a line *perpendicular* to the ecliptic plane. This **axis tilt** happens to be oriented so that the axis points almost directly at a star called *Polaris*, or the *North Star*. Keep in mind that the idea of axis tilt makes sense only in relation to the ecliptic plane. That is, the idea of "tilt" by itself has no meaning in space, where there is no absolute up or down. In space, "up" and "down" mean only "away from the center of Earth (or another planet)" and "toward the center of Earth," respectively.

**think about it**

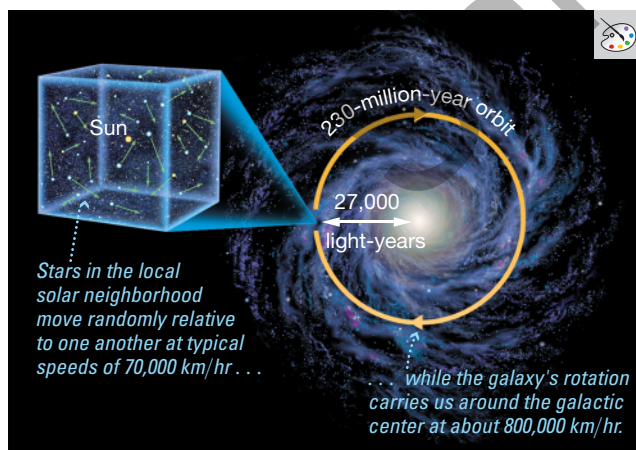
If there is no up or down in space, why do you think most globes have the North Pole on top? Would it be equally correct to have the South Pole on top or to turn the globe sideways? Explain.

Notice also that Earth orbits the Sun in the same direction that it rotates on its axis: counterclockwise as viewed from above the North Pole. This is not a coincidence but a consequence of the way our planet was born. As we'll discuss in Chapter 6, strong evidence indicates that Earth and the other planets were born in a spinning disk of gas that surrounded our Sun as it formed, and Earth rotates and orbits in the same direction as the disk was spinning.

**Motion Within the Milky Way Galaxy**

Rotation and orbit are only a small part of the travels of spaceship Earth. Our entire solar system is on a great journey within the Milky Way Galaxy. There are two major components to this motion, both shown in Figure 1.13.

First, our solar system is moving relative to nearby stars in our *local solar neighborhood*, the region of the Sun and nearby stars. The small box in Figure 1.13 shows that stars within the local solar neighborhood (like the stars of any other small region of the galaxy) move essentially at random relative to one another. The speeds are quite fast: On average, our Sun is moving relative to nearby stars at a speed of about 70,000 kilometers per hour (40,000 miles per hour), almost three times as fast as the international Space Station orbits Earth. Given these high speeds, you may wonder why we don't see stars racing around the sky. The answer lies in their vast distances from us. You've probably noticed that a distant airplane appears to move through the sky more slowly than one flying close overhead. Stars are so far away that even at speeds of 70,000 kilometers per hour, their motions would be noticeable to the naked eye only if we watched them for thousands of years. That is why the patterns in the constellations seem to remain fixed. Nevertheless, in 10,000 years the constellations will be noticeably different from those we see today. In 500,000 years they will be unrecognizable. If you could watch a time-lapse movie made over millions of years, you *would* see stars racing across the sky.



▲ **FIGURE 1.13**

This painting illustrates the motion of our solar system within our local solar neighborhood and around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy.



◀ **FIGURE 1.14**

This painting shows an edge-on view of the Milky Way Galaxy. Study of galactic rotation shows that although most visible stars lie in the disk and central bulge, most of the mass lies in the halo that surrounds and encompasses the disk. Because this mass emits no light that we have detected, we call it *dark matter*.

**think about it** Despite the chaos of motion in the local solar neighborhood over millions and billions of years, collisions between star systems are extremely rare. Explain why. (*Hint*: Consider the sizes of star systems, such as the solar system, relative to the distances between them.)

The second motion shown in Figure 1.13 is much more organized. If you look closely at leaves floating in a stream, their motions relative to one another might appear random, just like the motions of stars in the local solar neighborhood. As you widen your view, you see that all the leaves are being carried in the same general direction by the downstream current. In the same way, as we widen our view beyond the local solar neighborhood, the seemingly random motions of its stars give way to a simpler and even faster motion: rotation of the Milky Way Galaxy. Our solar system, located about 27,000 light-years from the galactic center, completes one orbit of the galaxy in about 230 million years. Even if you could watch from outside our galaxy, this motion would be unnoticeable to your naked eye. However, if you calculate the speed of our solar system as we orbit the center of the galaxy, you will find that it is close to 800,000 kilometers (500,000 miles) per hour.

Careful study of the galaxy's rotation reveals one of the greatest mysteries in science. Stars at different distances from the galactic center orbit at different speeds, and we can learn how mass is distributed in the galaxy by measuring these speeds. Such studies indicate that the stars in the disk of the galaxy represent only the "tip of the iceberg" compared to the mass of the entire galaxy (Figure 1.14). Most of the mass of the galaxy seems to be located outside the visible disk (occupying the galactic *halo* that surrounds and encompasses the disk), but the matter that makes up this mass is completely invisible to our telescopes. We therefore know very little about the nature of this matter, which we refer to as *dark matter* (because of the lack of light from it). Studies of other galaxies indicate that they also are made mostly of dark matter. These and other observations imply that dark matter significantly outweighs the ordinary matter that makes up planets and stars, making it the dominant source of gravity that has led to the formation of galaxies, clusters, and superclusters. We know even less about the mysterious **dark energy** that astronomers first recognized when they discovered that the expansion of the universe is actually getting faster with time, and that scientists have since found to make up the majority of the total energy content of the universe. We'll discuss the mysteries of dark matter and dark energy in Chapter 18.

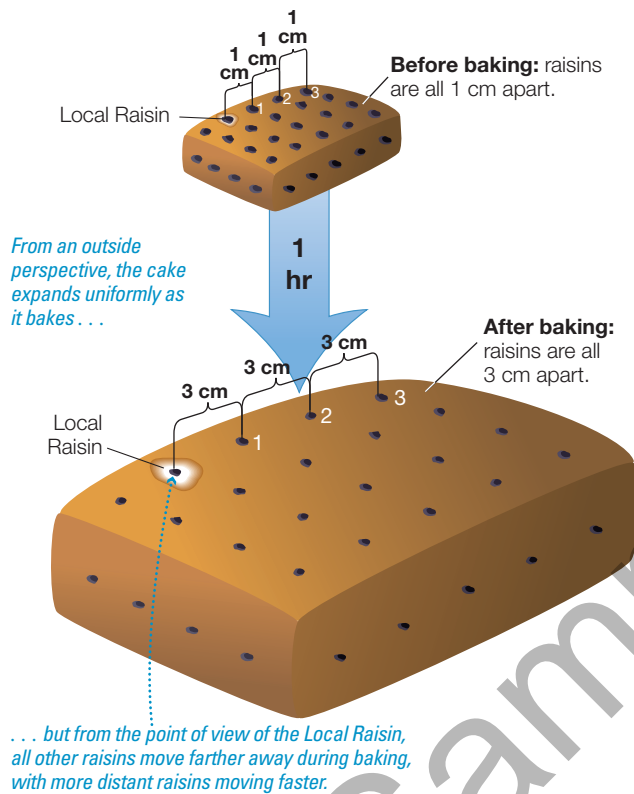
## ◆ How do galaxies move within the universe?

The billions of galaxies in the universe also move relative to one another. Within the Local Group (see Figure 1.1), some of the galaxies move toward us, some move away from us, and numerous small galaxies (including the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds) apparently orbit our Milky Way Galaxy. Again, the speeds are enormous by earthly standards. For example, the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies are moving toward each other at about 300,000 kilometers (180,000 miles) per hour. Despite this high speed, we needn't worry about a collision anytime soon. Even if the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies are approaching each other head-on, it will be billions of years before any collision begins.

When we look outside the Local Group, however, we find two astonishing facts recognized in the 1920s by Edwin Hubble, for whom the Hubble Space Telescope was named:

1. Virtually every galaxy outside the Local Group is moving *away* from us.
2. The more distant the galaxy, the faster it appears to be racing away.

These facts might make it sound as if we suffer from a cosmic case of chicken pox, but there is a much more natural explanation: *The entire universe is expanding.* We'll save the details for later in the book, but you can understand the basic idea by thinking about a raisin cake baking in an oven.



**The Raisin Cake Analogy** Imagine that you make a raisin cake in which the distance between adjacent raisins is 1 centimeter. You place the cake in the oven, where it expands as it bakes. After 1 hour, you remove the cake, which has expanded so that the distance between adjacent raisins has increased to 3 centimeters (Figure 1.15). The expansion of the cake seems fairly obvious. But what would you see if you lived *in* the cake, as we live in the universe?

Pick any raisin (it doesn't matter which one) and call it the Local Raisin. Figure 1.15 shows one possible choice, with three nearby raisins also labeled. The accompanying table summarizes what you would see if you lived within the Local Raisin. Notice, for example, that Raisin 1 starts out at a distance of 1 centimeter before baking and ends up at a distance of 3 centimeters after baking, which means it moves a distance of 2 centimeters farther away from the Local Raisin during the hour of baking. Hence, its speed as seen from the Local Raisin is 2 centimeters per hour. Raisin 2 moves from a distance of 2 centimeters before baking to a distance of 6 centimeters after baking, which means it moves a distance of 4 centimeters farther away from the Local Raisin during the hour. Hence, its speed is 4 centimeters per hour, or twice the speed of Raisin 1. Generalizing, the fact that the cake is expanding means that all the raisins are moving away from the Local Raisin, with more distant raisins moving away faster.

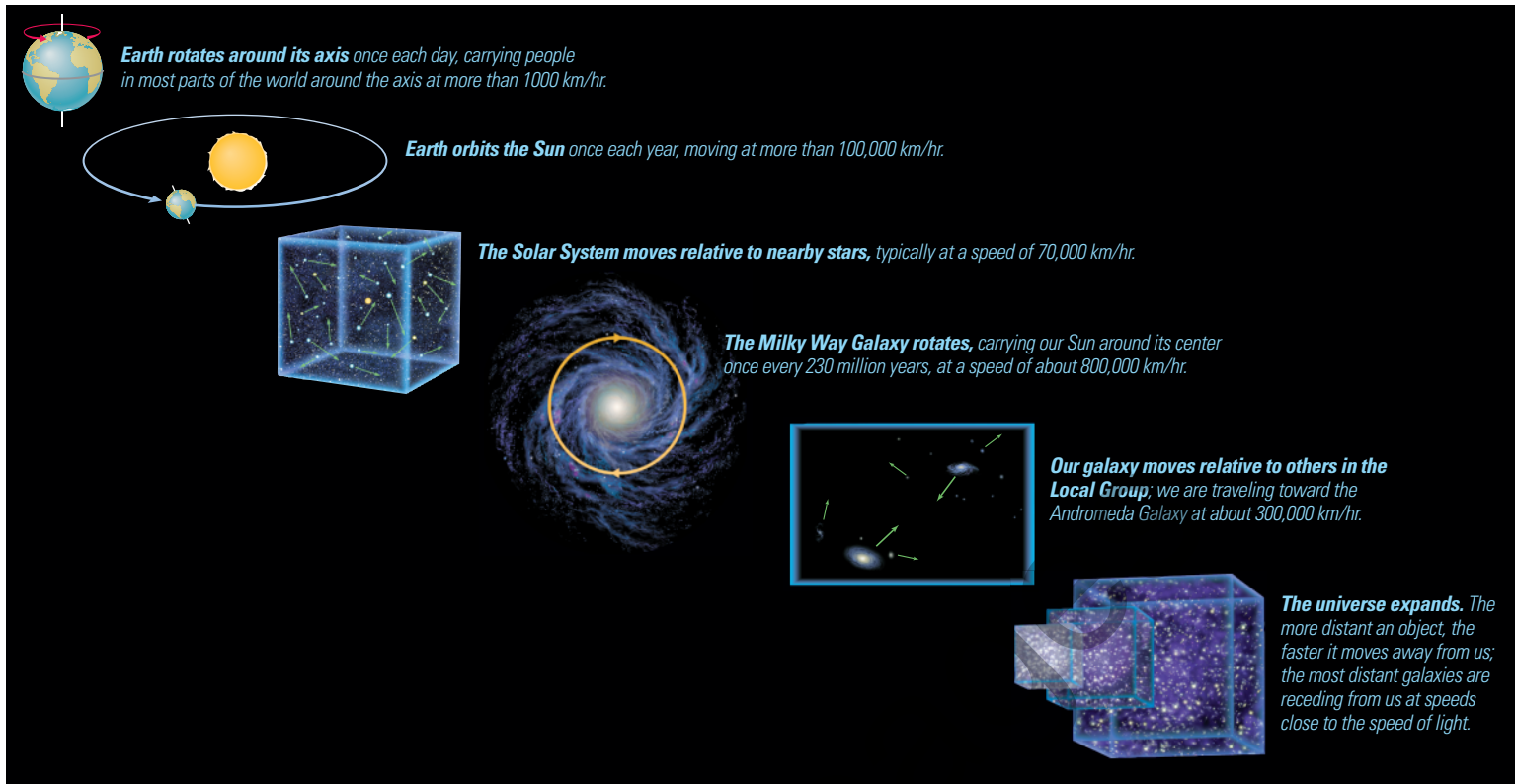
**Distances and Speeds as Seen from the Local Raisin**

Raisin Number	Distance Before Baking	Distance After Baking (1 hour later)	Speed
1	1 cm	3 cm	2 cm/hr
2	2 cm	6 cm	4 cm/hr
3	3 cm	9 cm	6 cm/hr
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮

### ▲ FIGURE 1.15

An expanding raisin cake offers an analogy to the expanding universe. Someone living in one of the raisins inside the cake could figure out that the cake is expanding by noticing that all other raisins are moving away, with more distant raisins moving away faster. In the same way, we know that we live in an expanding universe because all galaxies outside our Local Group are moving away from us, with more distant ones moving faster.

Hubble's discovery that galaxies are moving in much the same way as the raisins in the cake, with most moving away from us and more distant ones moving away faster, implies that the universe is expanding much like the raisin cake. If you now imagine the Local Raisin as representing our Local Group of galaxies and the other raisins as representing more distant galaxies or clusters of galaxies, you have a



▲ **FIGURE 1.16**

This figure summarizes the basic motions of Earth in the universe, along with their associated speeds.

basic picture of the expansion of the universe. Like the expanding dough between the raisins in the cake, *space* itself is growing between galaxies. More distant galaxies move away from us faster because they are carried along with this expansion like the raisins in the expanding cake. You can also now see how observations of expansion allow us to measure the age of the universe: The faster the rate of expansion, the more quickly the galaxies reached their current positions, and therefore the younger the universe must be. It is by precisely measuring the expansion rate that astronomers have learned that the universe is approximately 14 billion years old.

**The Real Universe** There's at least one important distinction between the raisin cake and the universe: A cake has a center and edges, but we do not think the same is true of the entire universe. Anyone living in any galaxy in an expanding universe sees just what we see—other galaxies moving away, with more distant ones moving away faster. Because the view from each point in the universe is about the same, no place can claim to be more “central” than any other place.

It's also important to realize that, unlike the case with a raisin cake, we can't actually *see* galaxies moving apart with time—the distances are too vast for any motion to be noticeable on the time scale of a human life. Instead, we measure the speeds of galaxies by spreading their light into spectra and observing what we call *Doppler shifts* [Section 5.2]. This illustrates how modern astronomy depends both on careful observations and on using current understanding of the laws of nature to explain what we see.

**Motion Summary** Figure 1.16 summarizes the motions we have discussed. As we have seen, we are never truly sitting still. We spin around Earth's axis at more than 1000 kilometers per hour, while our planet orbits the Sun at more than 100,000 kilometers per hour. Our solar system moves



among the stars of the local solar neighborhood at typical speeds of 70,000 kilometers per hour, while also orbiting the center of the Milky Way Galaxy at a speed of about 800,000 kilometers per hour. Our galaxy moves among the other galaxies of the Local Group, while all other galaxies move away from us at speeds that grow greater with distance in our expanding universe. Spaceship Earth is carrying us on a remarkable journey.

## the big picture Putting Chapter 1 into Perspective

In this first chapter, we developed a broad overview of our place in the universe. As we consider the universe in more depth in the rest of the book, remember the following “big picture” ideas:

- Earth is not the center of the universe but instead is a planet orbiting a rather ordinary star in the Milky Way Galaxy. The Milky Way Galaxy, in turn, is one of billions of galaxies in our observable universe.
- Cosmic distances are literally astronomical, but we can put them in perspective with the aid of scale models and other scaling techniques. When you think about these enormous scales, don’t forget that every star is a sun and every planet is a unique world.
- We are “star stuff.” The atoms from which we are made began as hydrogen and helium in the Big Bang and

were later fused into heavier elements by massive stars. Stellar deaths released these atoms into space, where our galaxy recycled them into new stars and planets. Our solar system formed from such recycled matter some 4½ billion years ago.

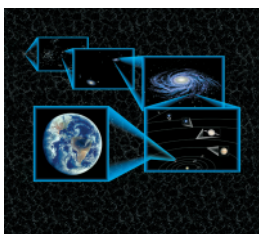
- We are latecomers on the scale of cosmic time. The universe was already more than half its current age when our solar system formed, and it took billions of years more before humans arrived on the scene.
- All of us are being carried through the cosmos on spaceship Earth. Although we cannot feel this motion, the associated speeds are surprisingly high. Learning about the motions of spaceship Earth gives us a new perspective on the cosmos and helps us understand its nature and history.

**my cosmic perspective** The science of astronomy affects all of us on many levels. In particular, it helps us understand how we as humans fit into the universe as a whole, and the history of astronomy has been deeply intertwined with the development of civilization.

## summary of key concepts

### 1.1 The Scale of the Universe

#### ◆ What is our place in the universe?



Earth is a planet orbiting the Sun. Our Sun is one of more than 100 billion stars in the **Milky Way Galaxy**. Our galaxy is one of more than 70 galaxies in the **Local Group**. The Local Group is one small part of the **Local Supercluster**, which is one small part of the **universe**.

#### ◆ How big is the universe?

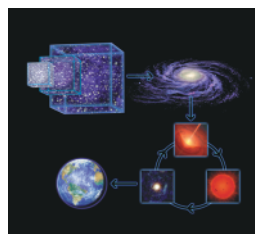


If we imagine our Sun as a large grapefruit, Earth is a ballpoint that orbits 15 meters away; the nearest stars are thousands of kilometers away on the same scale. Our galaxy contains more than 100 billion stars—so many that it would take thousands of years just to

count them out loud. The **observable universe** contains roughly 100 billion galaxies, and the total number of stars is comparable to the number of grains of dry sand on all the beaches on Earth.

### 1.2 The History of the Universe

#### ◆ How did we come to be?



The universe began in the **Big Bang** and has been expanding ever since, except in localized regions where gravity has caused matter to collapse into galaxies and stars. The Big Bang essentially produced only two chemical elements: hydrogen and helium. The rest have been produced by stars and

recycled within galaxies from one generation of stars to the next, which is why we are “star stuff.”

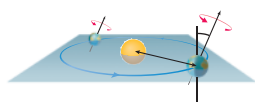
#### ◆ How do our lifetimes compare to the age of the universe?



On a cosmic calendar that compresses the history of the universe into 1 year, human civilization is just a few seconds old, and a human lifetime lasts only a fraction of a second.

## 1.3 Spaceship Earth

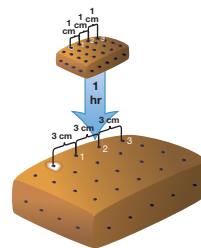
### ◆ How is Earth moving through space?



Earth **rotates** on its axis once each day and **orbits** the Sun once each year. At the same time, we move with our Sun in random directions relative to other

stars in our local solar neighborhood, while the galaxy's rotation carries us around the center of the galaxy every 230 million years.

### ◆ How do galaxies move within the universe?



Galaxies move essentially at random within the Local Group, but all galaxies beyond the Local Group are moving away from us. More distant galaxies are moving faster, which tells us that we live in an expanding universe.

## visual skills check

Check your understanding of some of the many types of visual information used in astronomy. For additional practice, try the Chapter 1 Visual Quiz at MasteringAstronomy®.

The figure at right shows the sizes of Earth and the Moon to scale; the scale used is 1 cm = 4000 km. Using what you've learned about astronomical scale in this chapter, answer the following questions. *Hint:* If you are unsure of the answers, you can calculate them using the given data.

Earth–Sun distance = 150,000,000 km

Diameter of Sun = 1,400,000 km

Earth–Moon distance = 384,000 km

Diameter of Earth = 12,800 km



1. If you wanted to show the distance between Earth and the Moon on the same scale, about how far apart would you need to place the two photos above?
  - a. 10 centimeters (about the width of your hand)
  - b. 1 meter (about the length of your arm)
  - c. 100 meters (about the length of a football field)
  - d. 1 kilometer (a little more than a half mile)
2. Suppose you wanted to show the Sun on the same scale. About how big would it need to be?
  - a. 3.5 centimeters in diameter (the size of a golf ball)
  - b. 35 centimeters in diameter (a little bigger than a basketball)
  - c. 3.5 meters in diameter (about 11½ feet across)
  - d. 3.5 kilometers in diameter (the size of a small town)
3. About how far away from Earth would the Sun be located on this scale?
  - a. 3.75 meters (about 12 feet)
  - b. 37.5 meters (about the height of a 12-story building)
  - c. 375 meters (about the length of four football fields)
  - d. 37.5 kilometers (the size of a large city)
4. Could you use the same scale to represent the distances to nearby stars? Why or why not?

## exercises and problems

MasteringAstronomy® For instructor-assigned homework and other learning materials, go to MasteringAstronomy®.

### Review Questions

1. Briefly describe the major levels of structure (such as planet, star, galaxy) in the universe.
2. Define *astronomical unit* and *light-year*.
3. Explain the statement *The farther away we look in distance, the further back we look in time*.
4. What do we mean by the *observable universe*? Is it the same thing as the entire universe?
5. Using techniques described in the chapter, put the following into perspective: the size of our solar system; the distance to nearby stars; the size and number of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy; the number of stars in the observable universe.
6. What do we mean when we say that the universe is *expanding*, and how does expansion lead to the idea of the *Big Bang* and our current estimate of the age of the universe?
7. In what sense are we “star stuff”?
8. Use the cosmic calendar to describe how the human race fits into the scale of time.
9. Briefly explain Earth’s daily rotation and annual orbit, defining the terms *ecliptic plane* and *axis tilt*.
10. Briefly describe our solar system’s location and motion within the Milky Way Galaxy.
11. What is *dark matter*? Where does it reside in our galaxy? What makes dark matter and *dark energy* so mysterious and so important?

- What key observations lead us to conclude that the universe is expanding? Use the raisin cake model to explain how these observations imply expansion.
- How does the expansion rate of the universe allow us to determine the age of the universe? Would a faster expansion rate imply an older or a younger age for the universe? Explain.

## Test Your Understanding

### Does It Make Sense?

Decide whether the statement makes sense (or is clearly true) or does not make sense (or is clearly false). Explain clearly; not all of these have definitive answers, so your explanation is more important than your chosen answer.

**Example:** I walked east from our base camp at the North Pole.

**Solution:** The statement does not make sense because east has no meaning at the North Pole—all directions are south from the North Pole.

- Our solar system is bigger than some galaxies.
- The universe is billions of light-years in age.
- It will take me light-years to complete this homework assignment!
- Someday we may build spaceships capable of traveling a light-year in only a decade.
- Astronomers discovered a moon that does not orbit a planet.
- NASA will soon launch a spaceship that will photograph our Milky Way Galaxy from beyond its halo.
- The observable universe is the same size today as it was a few billion years ago.
- Photographs of distant galaxies show them as they were when they were much younger than they are today.
- At a nearby park, I built a scale model of our solar system in which I used a basketball to represent Earth.
- Because nearly all galaxies are moving away from us, we must be located at the center of the universe.

### Quick Quiz

Choose the best answer to each of the following. Explain your reasoning with one or more complete sentences.

- Which of the following correctly lists our “cosmic address” from small to large? (a) Earth, solar system, Milky Way Galaxy, Local Group, Local Supercluster, universe (b) Earth, solar system, Local Group, Local Supercluster, Milky Way Galaxy, universe (c) Earth, Milky Way Galaxy, solar system, Local Group, Local Supercluster, universe
- An *astronomical unit* is (a) any planet’s average distance from the Sun. (b) Earth’s average distance from the Sun. (c) any large astronomical distance.
- The star Betelgeuse is about 600 light-years away. If it explodes tonight, (a) we’ll know because it will be brighter than the full Moon in the sky. (b) we’ll know because debris from the explosion will rain down on us from space. (c) we won’t know about it until about 600 years from now.
- If we represent the solar system on a scale that allows us to walk from the Sun to Pluto in a few minutes, then (a) the planets are the size of basketballs and the nearest stars are a few miles away. (b) the planets are marble-size or smaller and the nearest stars are thousands of miles away. (c) the planets are microscopic and the stars are light-years away.
- The total number of stars in the observable universe is roughly equivalent to (a) the number of grains of sand on all the beaches on Earth. (b) the number of grains of sand on Miami Beach. (c) infinity.

- When we say the universe is *expanding*, we mean that (a) everything in the universe is growing in size. (b) the average distance between galaxies is growing with time. (c) the universe is getting older.
- If stars existed but galaxies did not, (a) we would probably still exist anyway. (b) we would not exist because life on Earth depends on the light of galaxies. (c) we would not exist because we are made of material that was recycled in galaxies.
- Could we see a galaxy that is 50 billion light-years away? (a) Yes, if we had a big enough telescope. (b) No, because it would be beyond the bounds of our observable universe. (c) No, because a galaxy could not possibly be that far away.
- The age of our solar system is about (a) one-third of the age of the universe. (b) three-fourths of the age of the universe. (c) two billion years less than the age of the universe.
- The fact that nearly all galaxies are moving away from us, with more distant ones moving faster, helped us to conclude that (a) the universe is expanding. (b) galaxies repel each other like magnets. (c) our galaxy lies near the center of the universe.

### Process of Science

- Earth as a Planet.* For most of human history, scholars assumed Earth was the center of the universe. Today, we know that Earth is just one planet orbiting the Sun, and the Sun is just one star in a vast universe. How did science make it possible for us to learn these facts about Earth?
- Thinking About Scale.* One key to success in science is finding a simple way to evaluate new ideas, and making a simple scale model is often helpful. Suppose someone tells you that the reason it is warmer during the day than at night is that the day side of Earth is closer to the Sun than the night side. Evaluate this idea by thinking about the size of Earth and its distance from the Sun in a scale model of the solar system.
- Looking for Evidence.* In this first chapter, we have discussed the scientific story of the universe but have not yet discussed most of the evidence that backs it up. Choose one idea presented in this chapter—such as the idea that there are billions of galaxies in the universe, or that the universe was born in the Big Bang, or that the galaxy contains more dark matter than ordinary matter—and briefly discuss the type of evidence you would want to see before accepting the idea. (*Hint:* It’s okay to look ahead in the book to see the evidence presented in later chapters.)

### Group Work Exercise

- Counting the Milky Way’s Stars.* **Roles:** *Scribe* (takes notes on the group’s activities), *Proposer* (proposes explanations to the group), *Skeptic* (points out weaknesses in proposed explanations), *Moderator* (leads group discussion and makes sure everyone contributes). **Activity:** Work as a group to answer each part.
  - Estimate the number of stars in the Milky Way from two facts: (1) the number of stars within 12 light-years of the Sun, which you can count in Appendix F; (2) the total volume of the Milky Way’s disk (100,000 light-years in diameter and 1000 light-years thick) is about 1 billion times the volume of the region of your star count.
  - Compare your value from part (a) to the value given in this chapter. Write down a list of possible reasons why your technique may have given you an underestimate or overestimate of the actual number.

## Investigate Further

### Short-Answer/Essay Questions

38. *Alien Technology.* Some people believe that Earth is regularly visited by aliens who travel here from other star systems. For this to be true, how much more advanced than our own technology would the aliens' technology have to be? Write one to two paragraphs to give a sense of the technological difference. (*Hint:* The ideas of scale in this chapter can help you contrast the distance the aliens would have to travel with the distances we currently are capable of traveling.)
39. *Stellar Collisions.* Is there any danger that another star will come crashing through our solar system in the near future? Explain.
40. *Raisin Cake Universe.* Suppose that all the raisins in a cake are 1 centimeter apart before baking and 4 centimeters apart after baking.
  - a. Draw diagrams to represent the cake before and after baking.
  - b. Identify one raisin as the Local Raisin on your diagrams. Construct a table showing the distances and speeds of other raisins as seen from the Local Raisin.
  - c. Briefly explain how your expanding cake is similar to the expansion of the universe.
41. *The Cosmic Perspective.* Write a short essay describing how the ideas presented in this chapter affect your perspectives on your own life and on human civilization.

### Quantitative Problems

Be sure to show all calculations clearly and state your final answers in complete sentences.

42. *Distances by Light.* Just as a light-year is the distance that light can travel in 1 year, we define a light-second as the distance that light can travel in 1 second, a light-minute as the distance that light can travel in 1 minute, and so on. Calculate the distance in both kilometers and miles represented by each of the following:
  - a. 1 light-second
  - b. 1 light-minute
  - c. 1 light-hour
  - d. 1 light-day
43. *Moonlight and Sunlight.* How long does it take light to travel from
  - a. the Moon to Earth?
  - b. the Sun to Earth?
44. *Saturn vs. the Milky Way.* Photos of Saturn and photos of galaxies can look so similar that children often think the photos show similar objects. In reality, a galaxy is far larger than any planet. About how many times larger is the diameter of the Milky Way Galaxy than the diameter of Saturn's rings? (*Data:* Saturn's rings are about 270,000 km in diameter; the Milky Way is 100,000 light-years in diameter.)
45. *Driving Trips.* Imagine that you could drive your car at a constant speed of 100 km/hr (62 mi/hr), even across oceans and in space. How long would it take to drive
  - a. around Earth's equator? (Earth's circumference  $\approx$  40,000 km)
  - b. from the Sun to Earth?
  - c. from the Sun to Pluto? (Pluto distance  $\approx$   $5.9 \times 10^9$  km)
  - d. to Alpha Centauri (4.4 light-years)?

46. *Faster Trip.* Suppose you wanted to reach Alpha Centauri in 100 years.
  - a. How fast would you have to go, in km/hr?
  - b. How many times faster is the speed you found in (a) than the speeds of our fastest current spacecraft (around 50,000 km/hr)?
47. *Age of the Universe.* Suppose we did not yet know the expansion rate of the universe, and two astronomers came up with two different measurements: Allen measured an expansion rate for the universe that was 50% faster than the expansion rate Wendy measured. Is the age of the universe that Allen inferred older or younger than the age that Wendy inferred? By how much? Explain.

### Discussion Questions

48. *Vast Orbs.* Dutch astronomer Christiaan Huygens may have been the first person to truly understand both the large sizes of other planets and the great distances to other stars. In 1690, he wrote, "How vast those Orbs must be, and how inconsiderable this Earth, the Theatre upon which all our mighty Designs, all our Navigations, and all our Wars are transacted, is when compared to them. A very fit consideration, and matter of Reflection, for those Kings and Princes who sacrifice the Lives of so many People, only to flatter their Ambition in being Masters of some pitiful corner of this small Spot." What do you think he meant? Explain.
49. *Infant Species.* In the last few tenths of a second before midnight on December 31 of the cosmic calendar, we have developed an incredible civilization and learned a great deal about the universe, but we also have developed technology through which we could destroy ourselves. The midnight bell is striking, and the choice for the future is ours. How far into the next cosmic year do you think our civilization will survive? Defend your opinion.
50. *A Human Adventure.* Astronomical discoveries clearly are important to science, but are they also important to our personal lives? Defend your opinion.

### Web Projects

51. *NASA Missions.* Visit the NASA website to learn about upcoming astronomy missions. Write a one-page summary of the mission you feel is most likely to provide new astronomical information during the time you are enrolled in this astronomy course.
52. *The Hubble Extreme Deep Field.* The photo that opens this chapter is called the Hubble *Extreme Deep Field*. Find the photo on the Hubble Space Telescope website. Learn how it was taken, what it shows, and what we've learned from it. Write a short summary of your findings.
53. *Dwarf Planets.* The 2006 decision to call Pluto a "dwarf planet" still generates controversy. Gather and summarize information about the results from the *New Horizons* mission to Pluto and the *Dawn* mission to the dwarf planet (and large asteroid) Ceres. Where did you get your information? How do you know it is reliable? Has this information shed any light on the classification of Pluto, Ceres, and other solar system bodies? Overall, what is your opinion about the appropriate classification of these bodies?