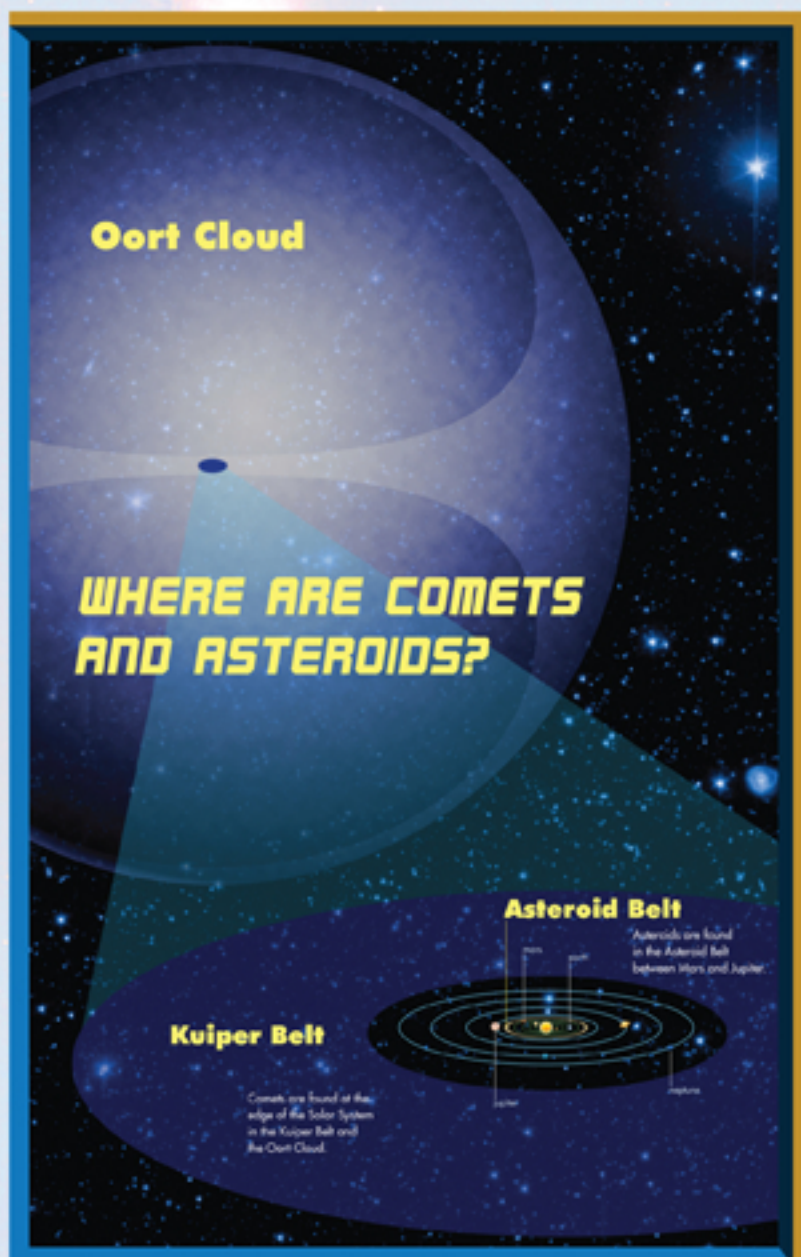


Comets and Asteroids Up-close



Credit: Space Science Institute/NCIL

Is Earth in danger?

Asteroids and comets can hurtle close to Earth. Some have crashed into our planet with disastrous results. Could a collision happen again? Almost certainly. But it's very unlikely that a dangerous one will hit anytime soon.



Credit: Space Science Institute/NCIL

Asteroids and comets are left over remnants from the formation of the Solar System. Asteroids exist primarily in a donut-shaped "torus", called the asteroid belt, located between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Comets exist primarily in a region called the Kuiper Belt, which is much farther away from Earth beyond the most distant planet, Neptune, and in a spherical region called the Oort cloud, at the most distant reaches of the Solar System.



This image of comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko was taken by the Rosetta spacecraft on Nov. 20, 2014, from just 19 miles away.



The Dawn Mission set out in 2007 to explore the two largest objects in the Asteroid Belt: Vesta and Ceres. Scientists hope these massive, but very different, objects will help us understand more about the dawn of our Solar System. This image is a close-up of Vesta.

Killer from Space

Scientists think a giant asteroid or comet killed the dinosaurs – and three-fourths of other animal and plant species – 65 million years ago. This artist's concept envisioned the moment of impact.