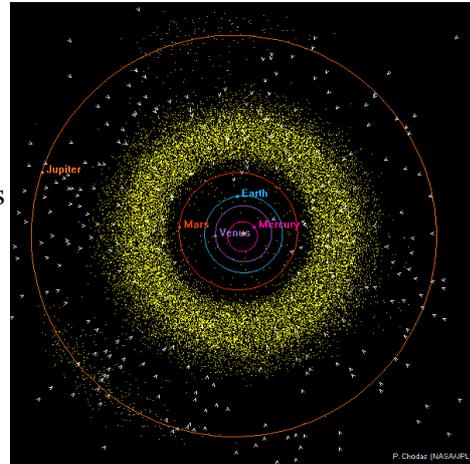


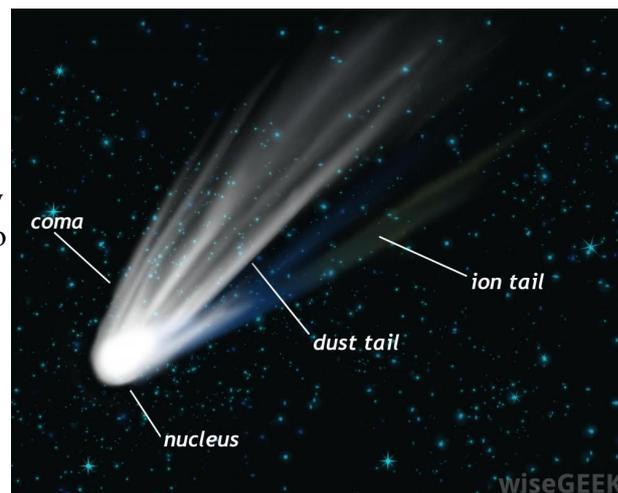
The Asteroid Belt

The Asteroid Belt is a band of asteroids that sits between the orbits of the planets Jupiter and Mars. It is made up of thousands of objects too small to be considered planets. Some of them no larger than a grain of dust, while others, like Eros can be more than 100 miles across. A few, like Ida, even have their own moons.

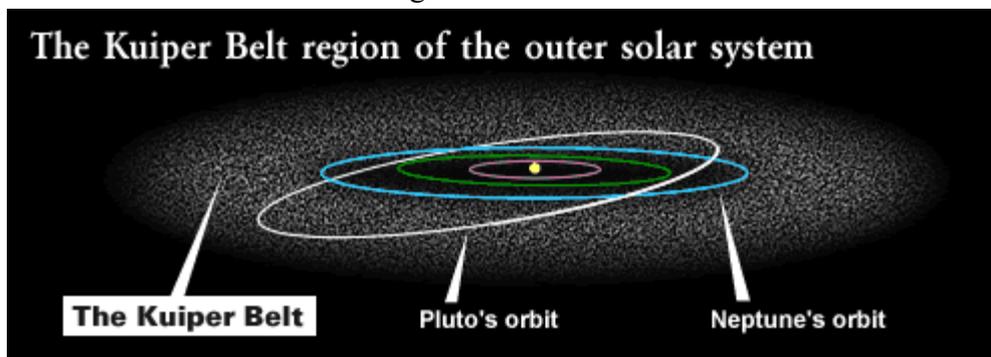


The Kuiper Belt (the birthplace of Comets!)

Further out, beyond the orbit of the minor planet Pluto, sits another belt known as the Kuiper Belt. Like the Asteroid Belt, the Kuiper Belt is also made up of thousands, possibly even millions of objects too small to be considered planets. A few of these objects, like Pluto, are large enough so their gravity has pulled them into a sphere shape. These objects are made out of mostly frozen gas with small amounts of dust.



They are often called **dirty snowballs**. However, you probably know them by their other name... comets. Every once in a while one of these comets will be thrown off of its orbit in the Kuiper Belt and hurled towards the inner Solar System where it slowly melts in a fantastic show of tail and light

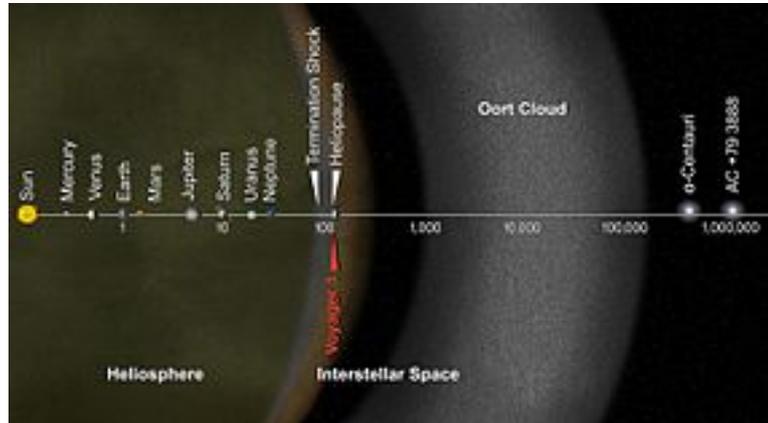


The Oort Cloud

Beyond the Kuiper Belt sits a vast area known as the Oort Cloud.

Here within this jumbled disorganized cloud live millions of additional comets.

These comets do not orbit the Sun in a ring or belt.



Instead, each one buzzes around in a completely **random direction**, and at extremely **high velocities**.

The Sun's solar winds continue pushing outward until they finally begin to mix into the interstellar medium, becoming lost with the winds from other stars. This creates a sort of bubble called the Heliosphere. Scientists define the boundaries of the Solar System as being the border of the Heliosphere, or at the place where the solar winds from the Sun mix with the winds from other stars.

The Heliosphere extends out from the Sun to a distance of about 15 billion miles, which is more than 160 times further from the Sun than is the Earth.

