

Sun-Earth System Overview

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(thanks to Dr. Frank Eparvier for
making most of the slides)

Why do We on Earth Care about the Sun?

The Sun directly or indirectly provides nearly all of the energy to the Earth system.

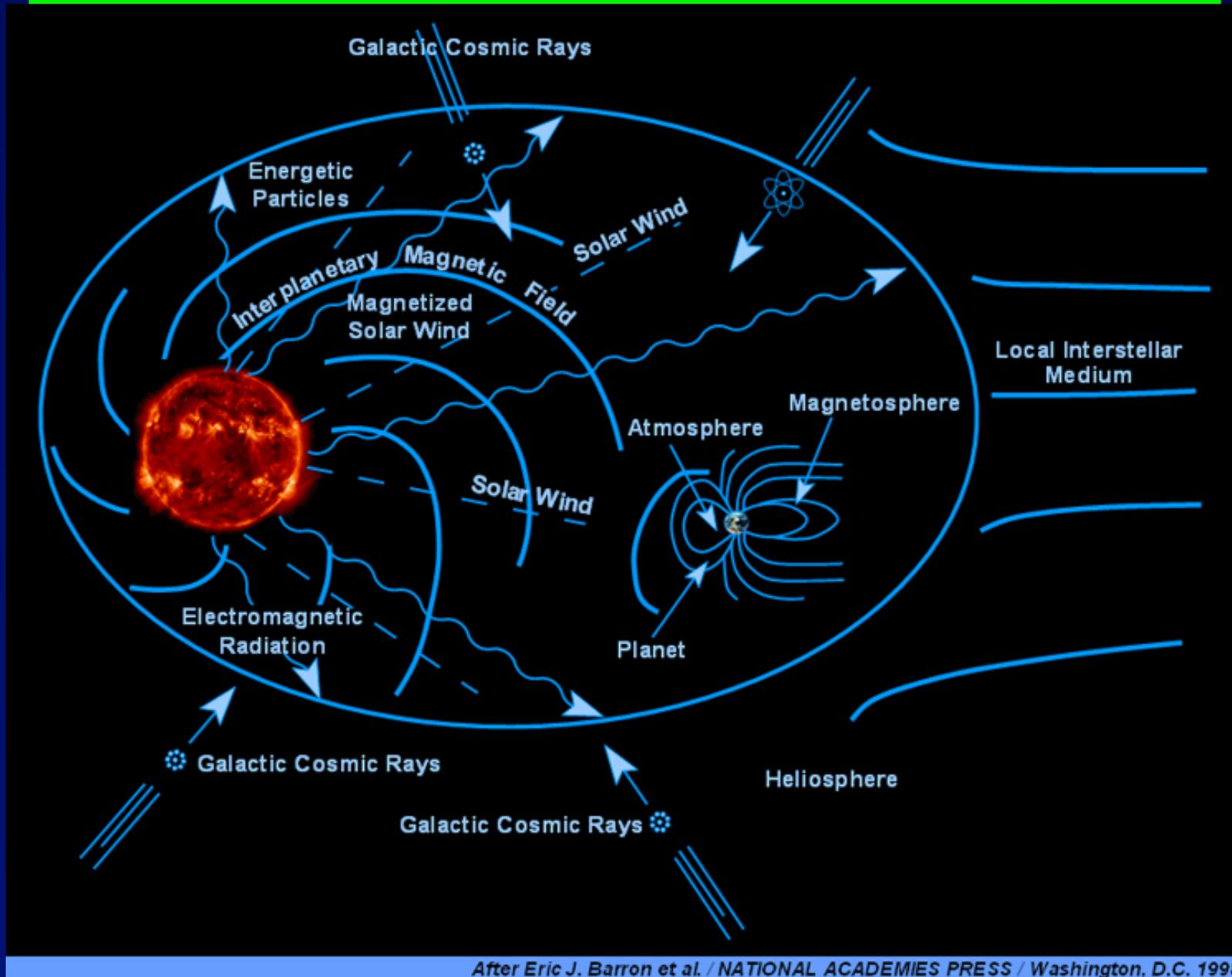
Photons (light of all wavelengths)

Plasmas (charged particles and magnetic fields)

Variability in the solar output drives variability in the Earth system.

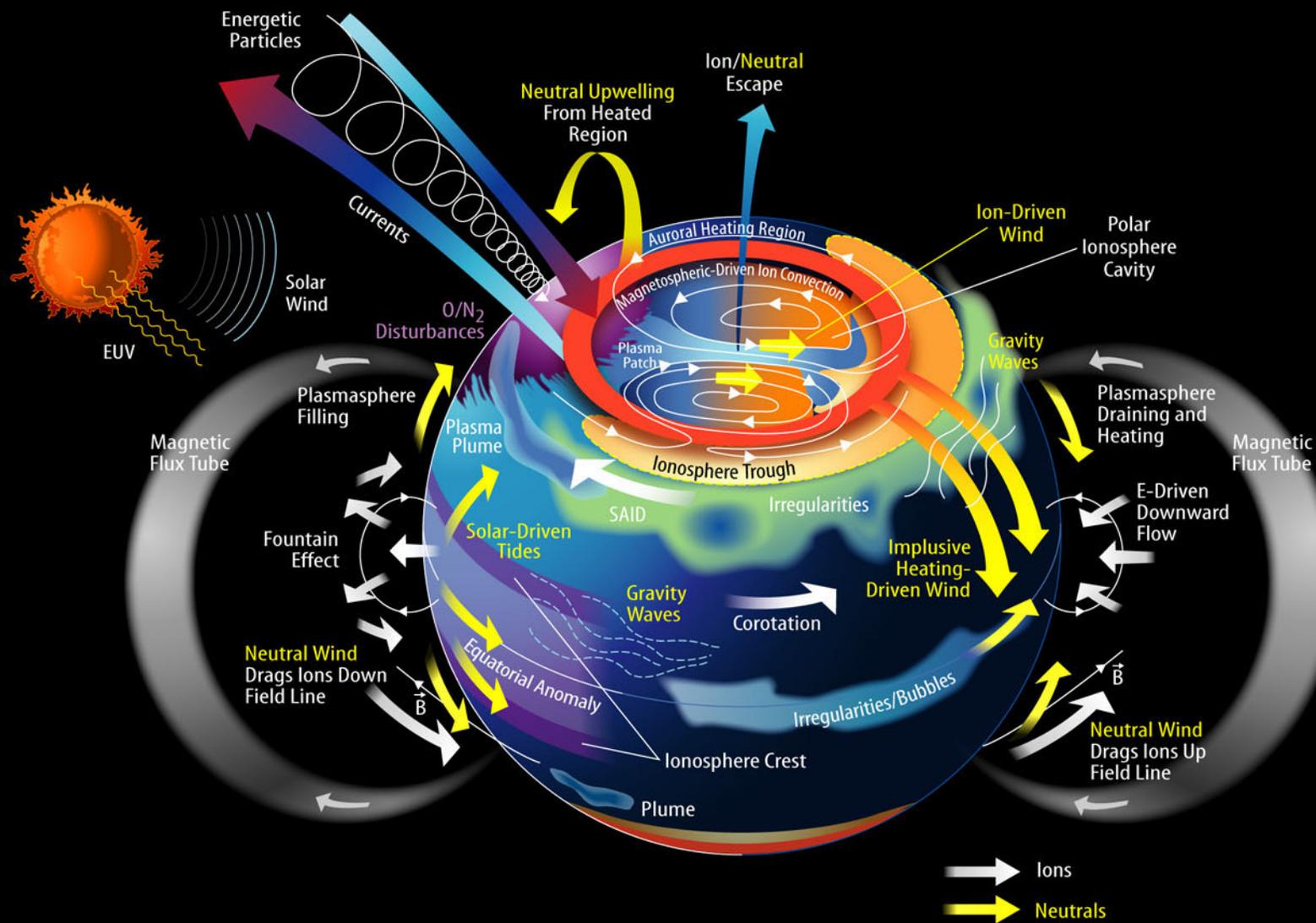
How the Earth system reacts to solar variability depends on the complicated, interconnected mechanisms involved in the Sun-Earth system.

The Sun Side of the Sun-Earth System



After Eric J. Barron et al. / NATIONAL ACADEMIES PRESS / Washington, D.C. 1998

The Earth Side of the Sun-Earth System



Statistics of the Sun

Radius = 696,000 km \approx 109 R_{Earth}

Volume \approx 1,300,000 V_{Earth}

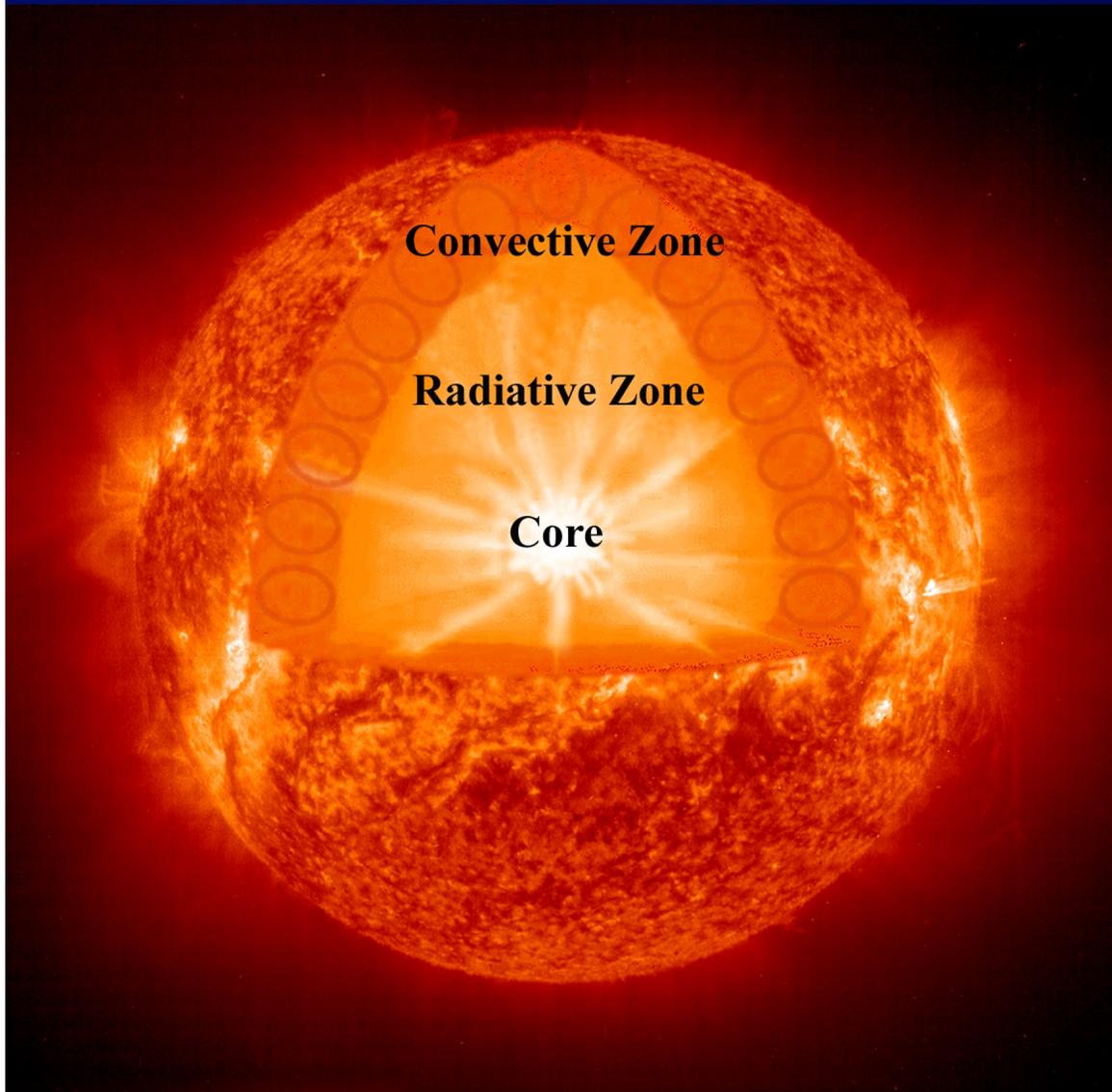
Mass = 1.99×10^{30} kg \approx 333,000 M_{Earth}

Composition:

Element	by Number	by Mass
Hydrogen	92.1%	75%
Helium	7.8%	25%
Heavier Elements	<0.1%	<0.1%

Much of this is in the form of ionized atoms = **plasma**

Energy Flow and Layers of the Sun



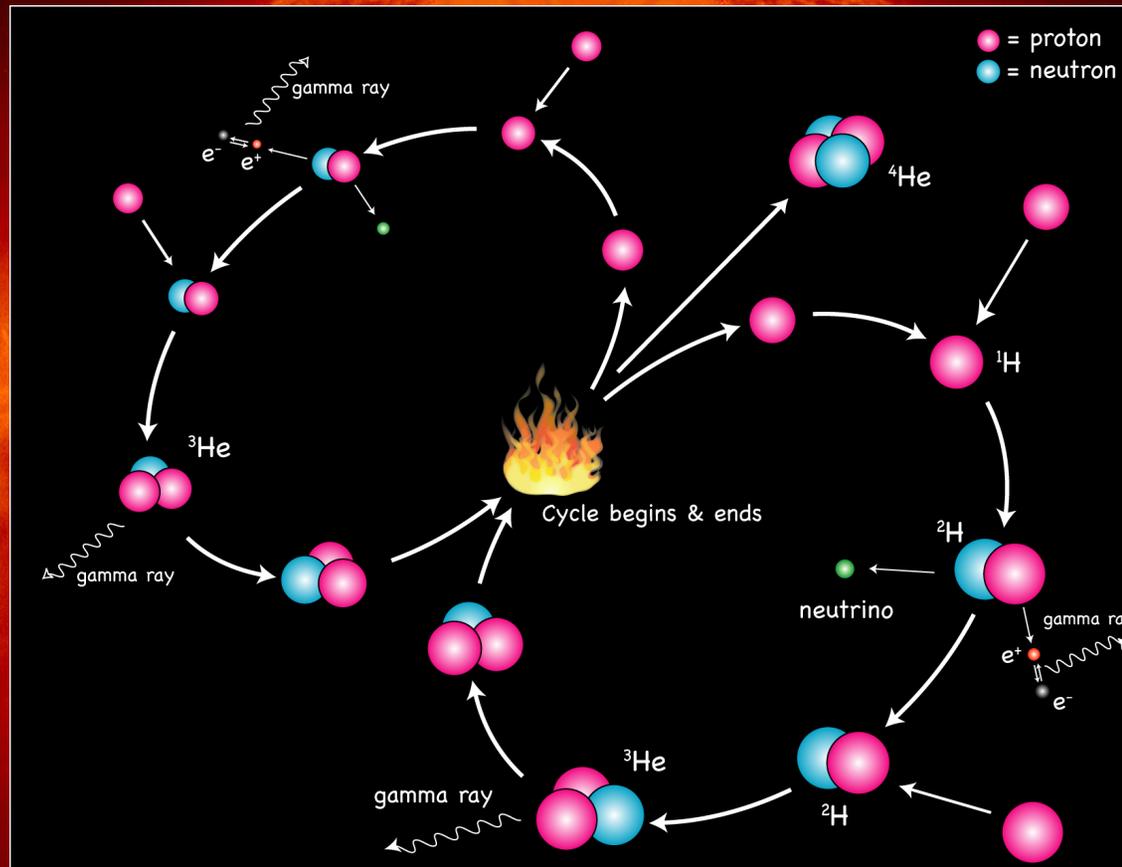
Interior of Sun:

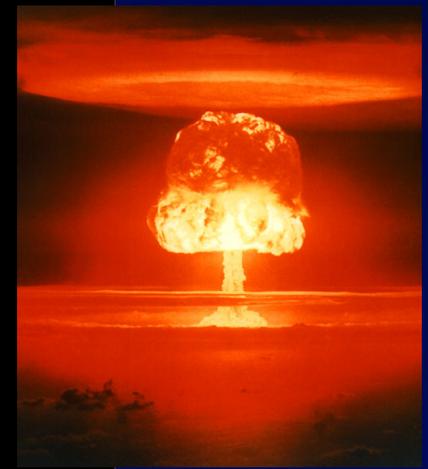
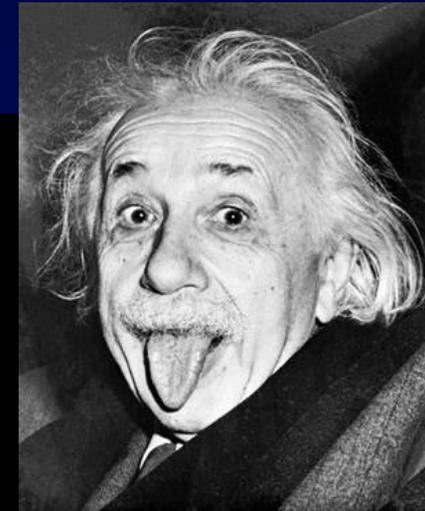
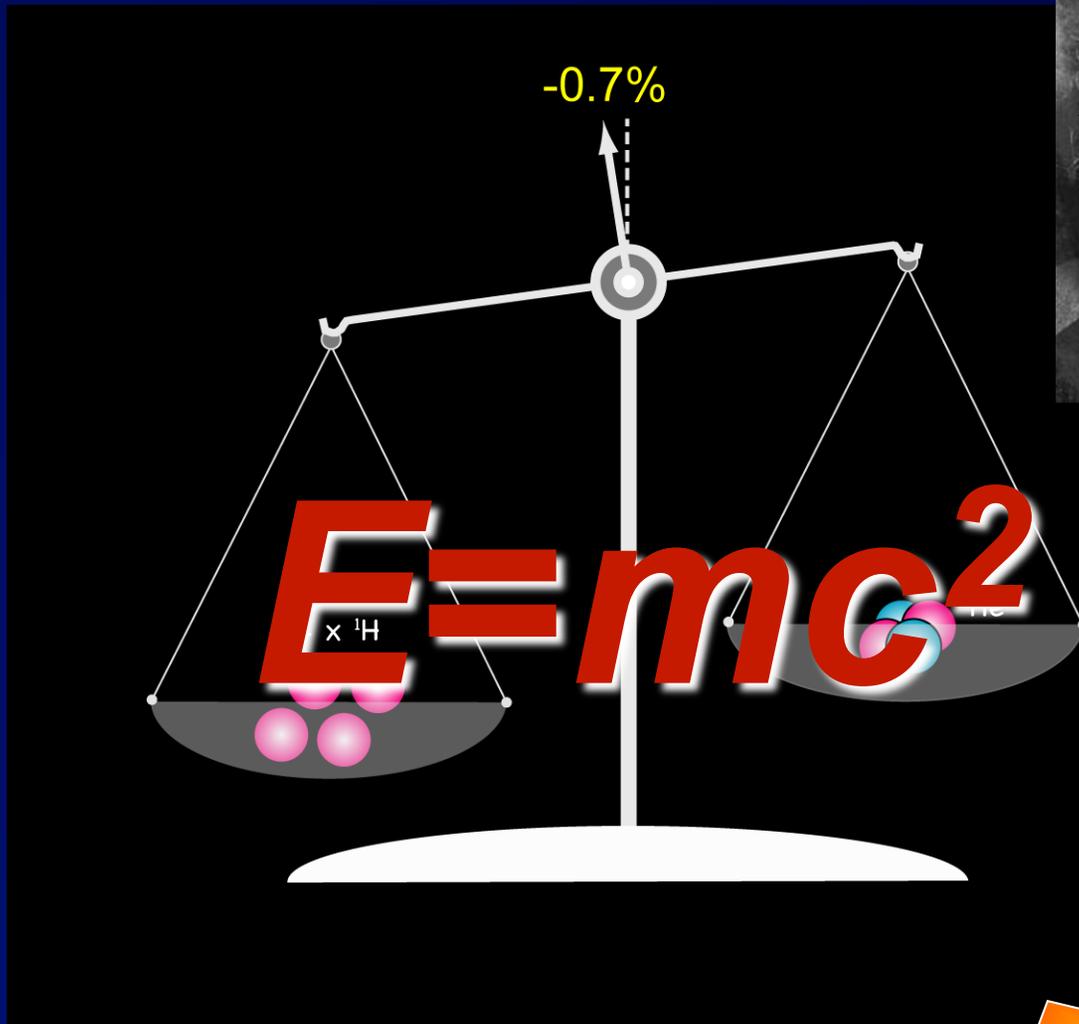
Core: Where fusion occurs, ~15 million K

Radiative Zone: Energy carried outward slowly (~200,000 yrs) by photons through a very thick region of H & He, T~5 million K

Convective Zone: Energy carried outward via convection (hot plasma rises, reaches surface, radiatively cools, then sinks again), T~1 million K

Hydrogen Fusion in the Sun "The Proton-Proton Chain"





$600 \times 10^9 \text{ kg H} \longrightarrow 596 \times 10^9 \text{ kg He}$

$4 \times 10^9 \text{ kg to Energy}$

Energy Output of the Sun

Measure all photonic energy coming from the Sun at all wavelengths

Total Solar Irradiance = 1361 Watt/m² at 1 AU



Energy Flow and Layers of the Sun (2)

Atmosphere of Sun:

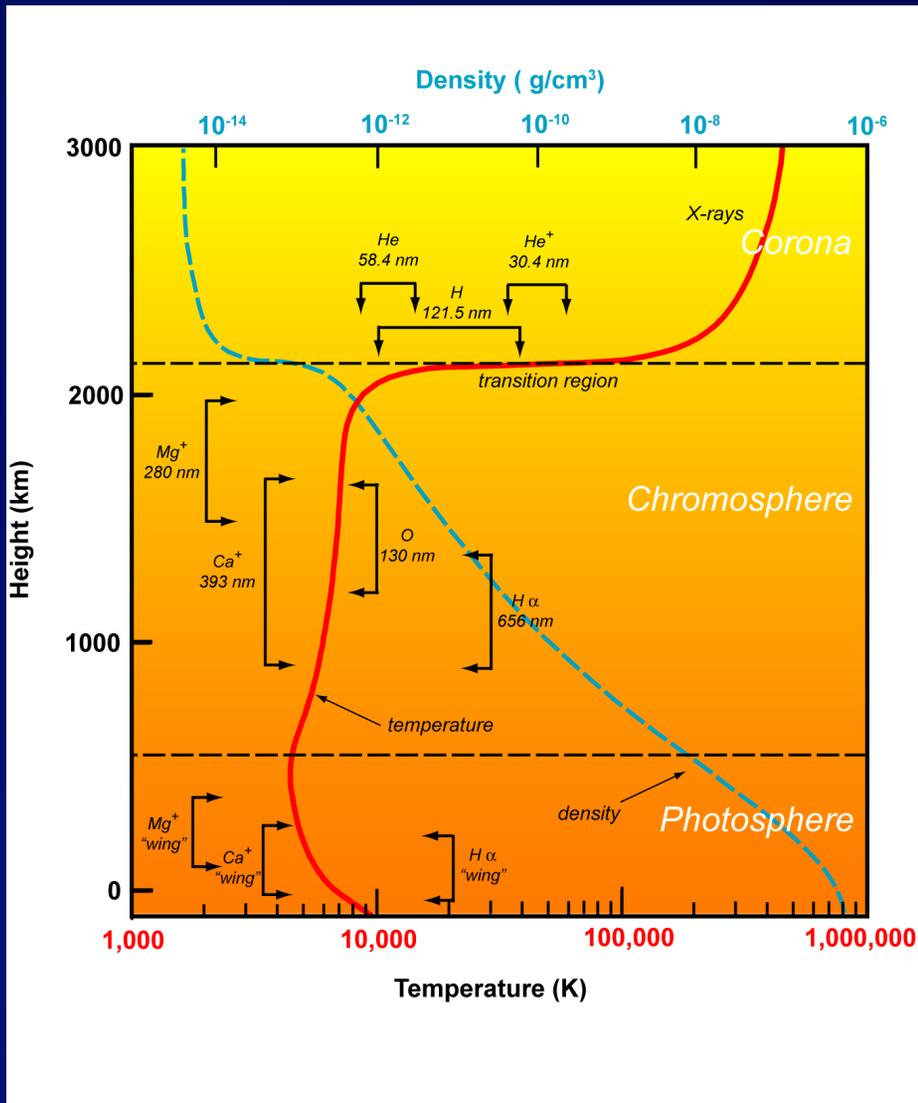
Photosphere: visible “surface” of Sun, point where gases go from being optically thick (opaque) to optically thin (transparent), $T \sim 5700$ K

Chromosphere: “bottom” layer of atmosphere, visible as pink layer of hydrogen during total solar eclipses, $T \sim 10,000$ K

Transition Region: narrow (~ 100 - 1000 km) layer between chromosphere and corona where temperatures rise rapidly $T \sim 10,000$ K - 1 million K

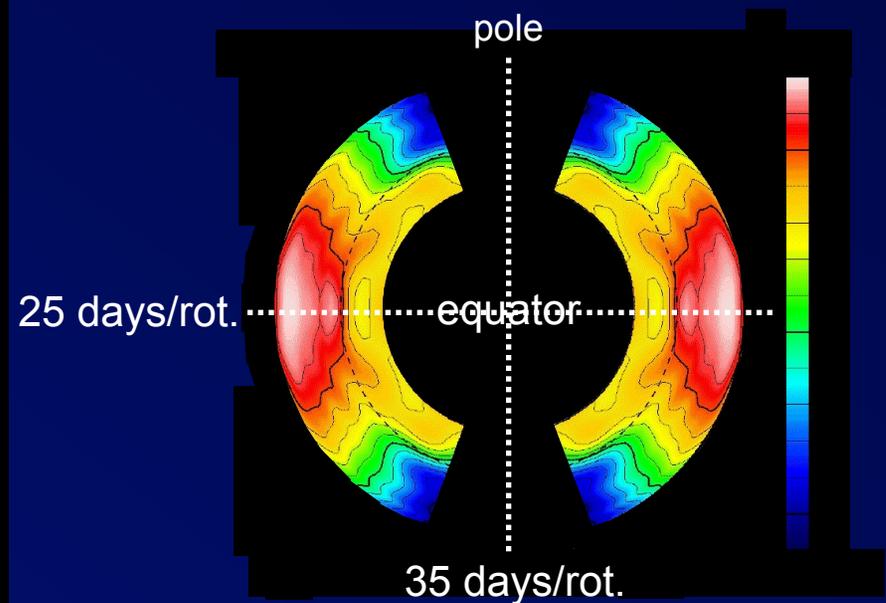
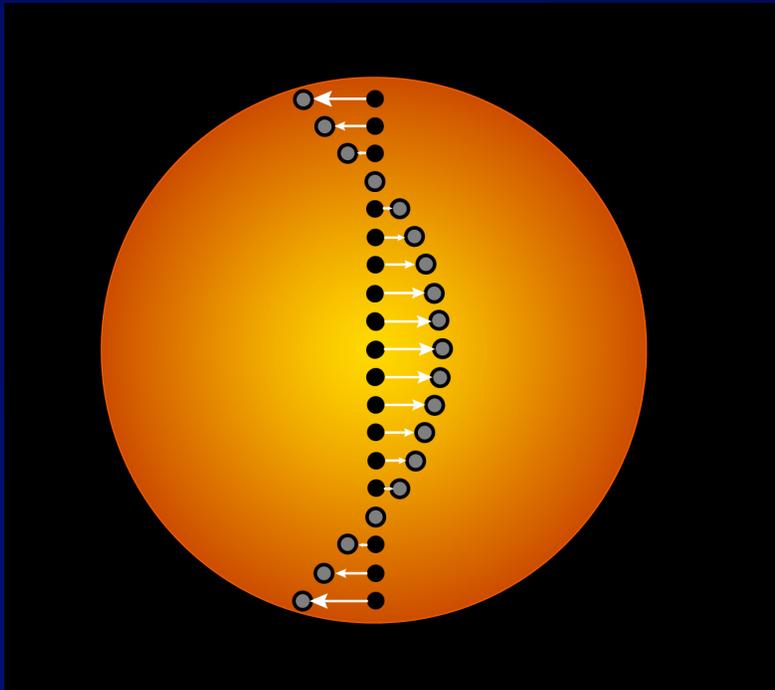
Corona: “top” of solar atmosphere heated to extremes by complex (and not fully understood) magnetic means, $T \sim 2$ million K

Solar Wind: extension of corona into interplanetary space, mostly protons and electrons streaming out on Sun’s magnetic field at speeds of ~ 400 - 1000 km/s, $T \sim 200,000$ K at 1 AU



Differential Rotation of Sun

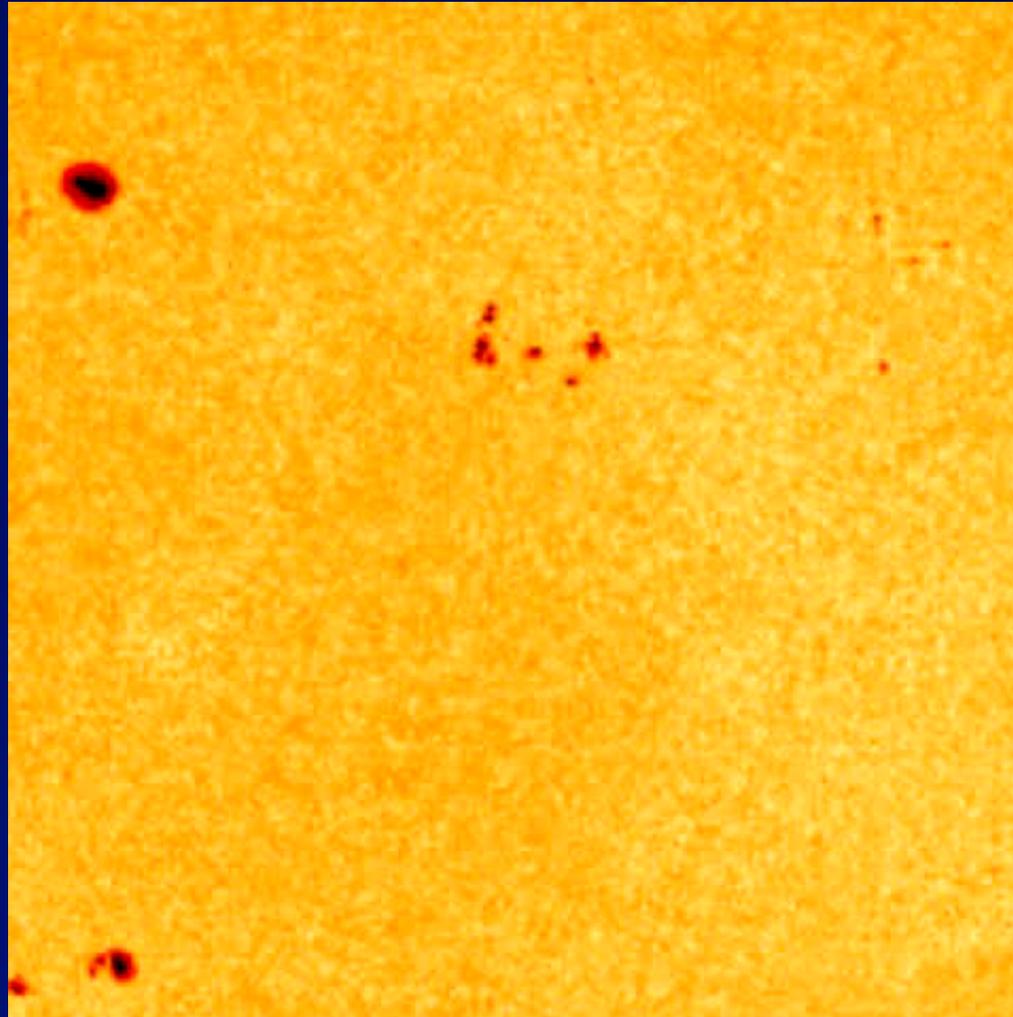
Core and Radiative Zone rotate rigidly.
Outer layers of Sun rotate differentially.



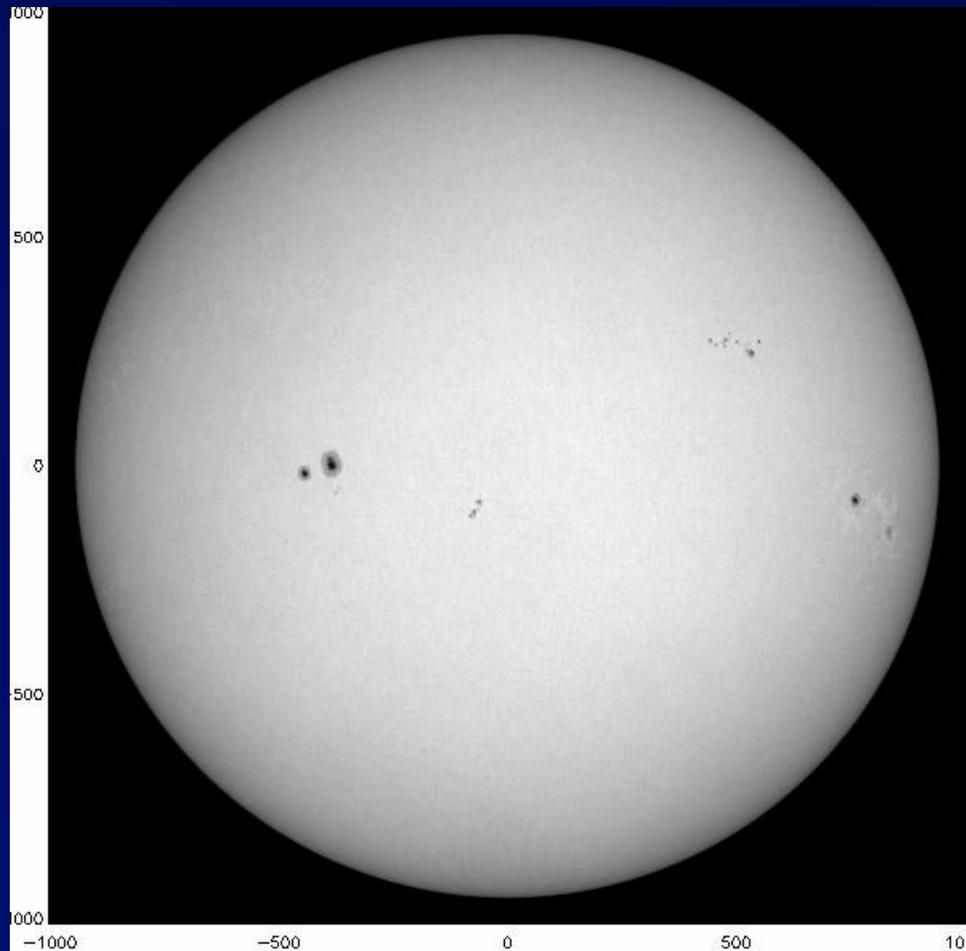
Looking at the “Surface” of the Sun

Different wavelengths show us a different Sun.

Features that are dark at one wavelength are bright at other wavelengths.

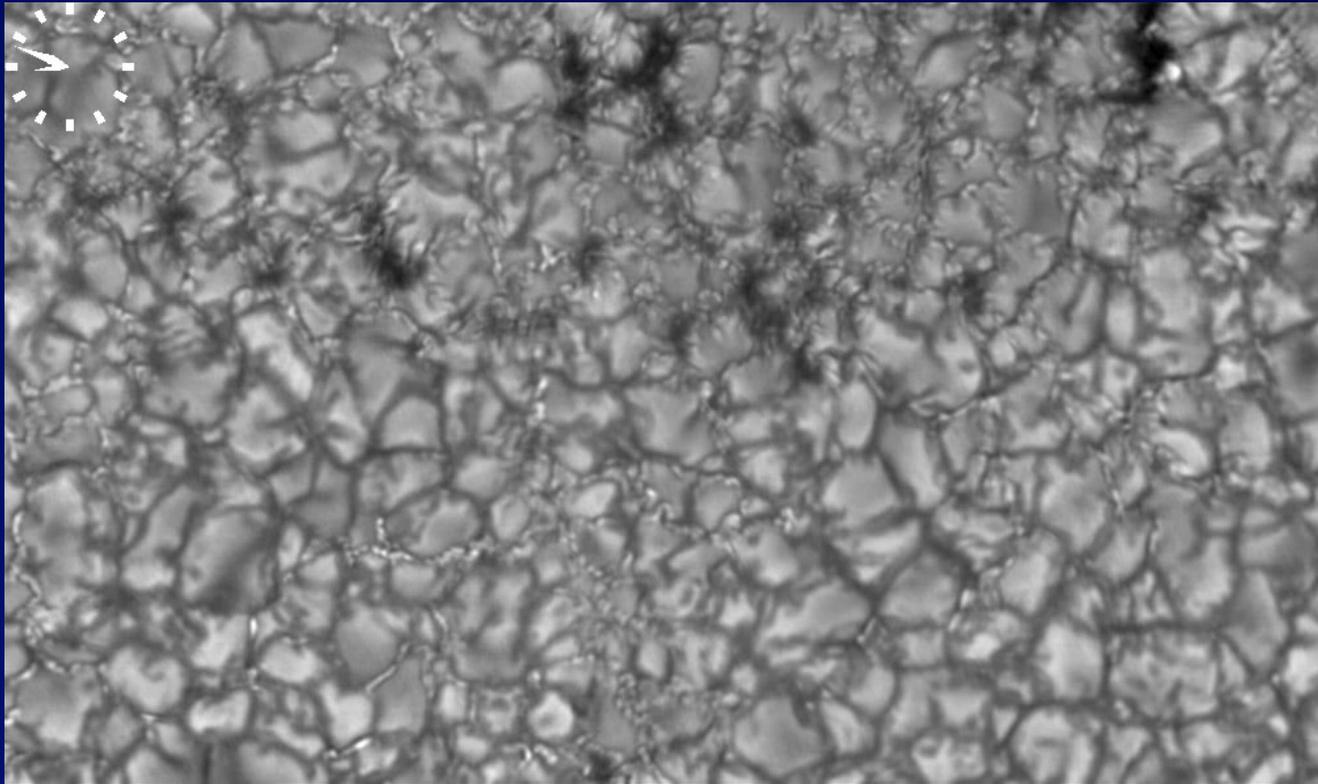


Surface Features

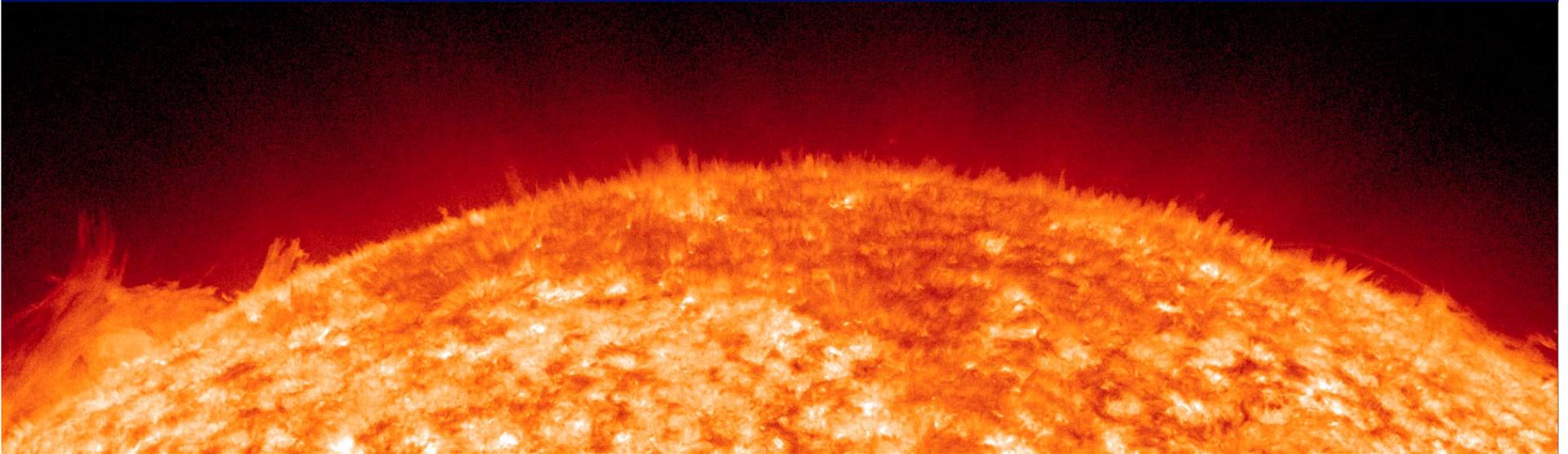


Granules

Granules: Convection cells on photosphere, size ~ 1000 km (~ size of Texas)



Spicules



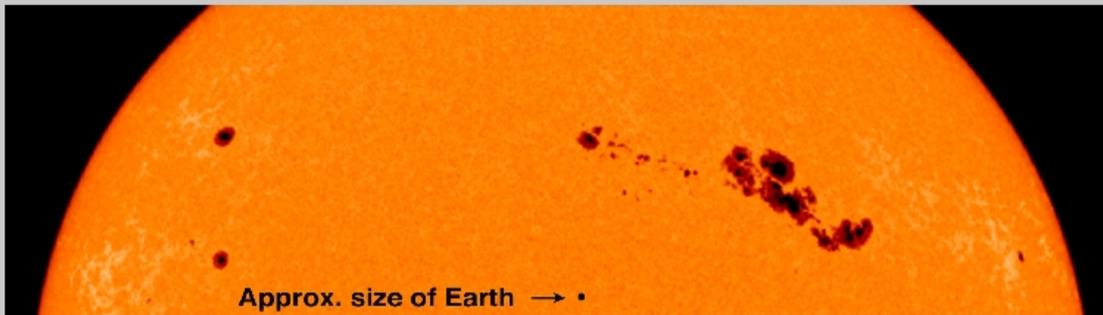
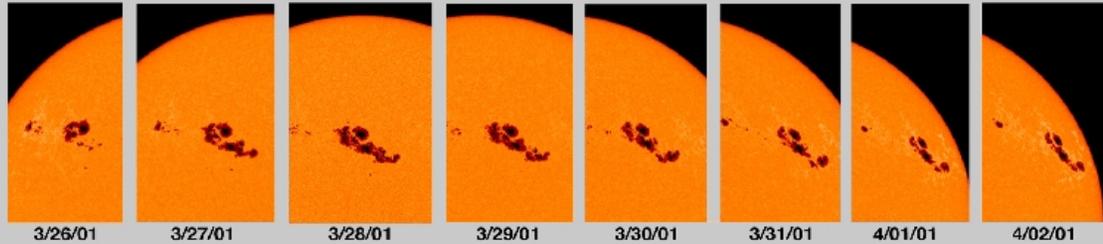
The Sun's surface is in constant motion.

...unlike your typical cat.

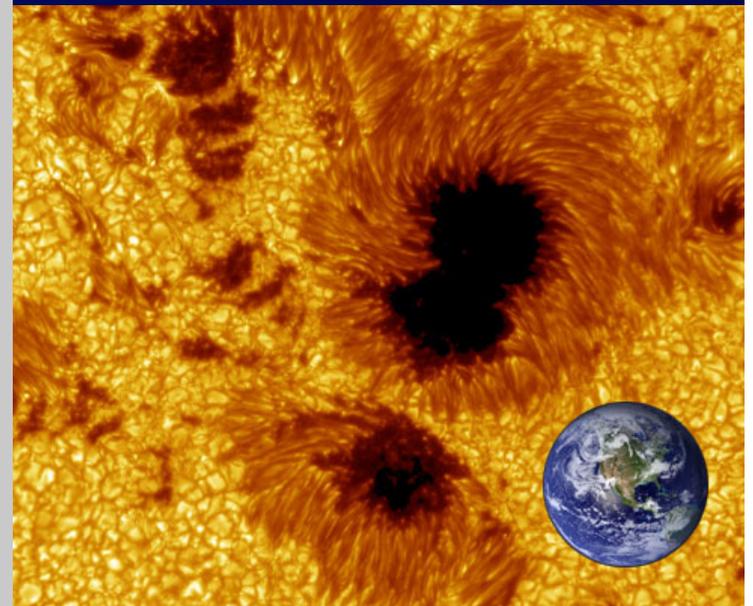


Sunspots

Sunspots: Magnetically disturbed regions cooler than surrounding areas ($\sim 4000 - 5000$ K) of photosphere (\therefore darker), usually come in pairs (N and S magnetic polarity), size $\sim 1500-50,000$ km, can last for months

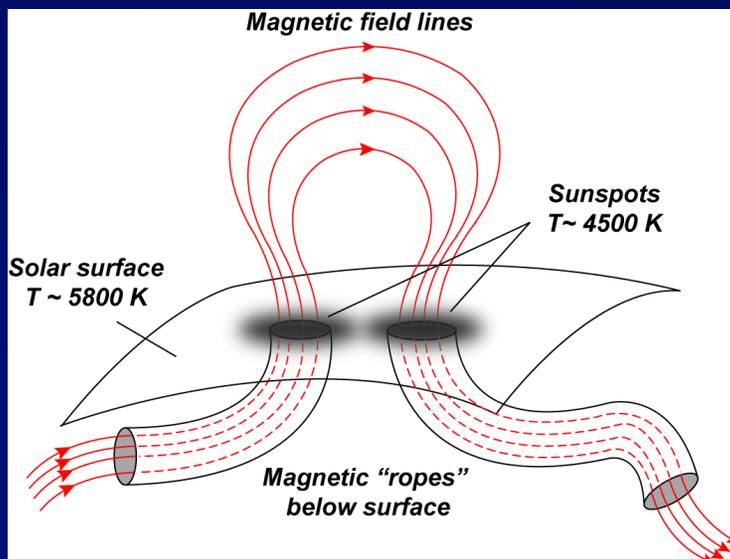
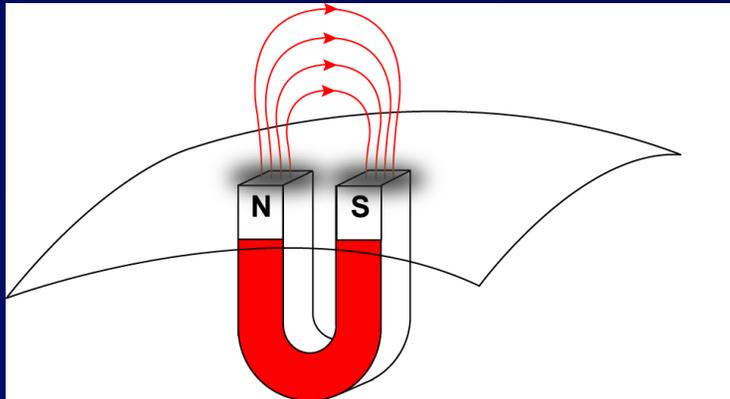


March 30, 2001



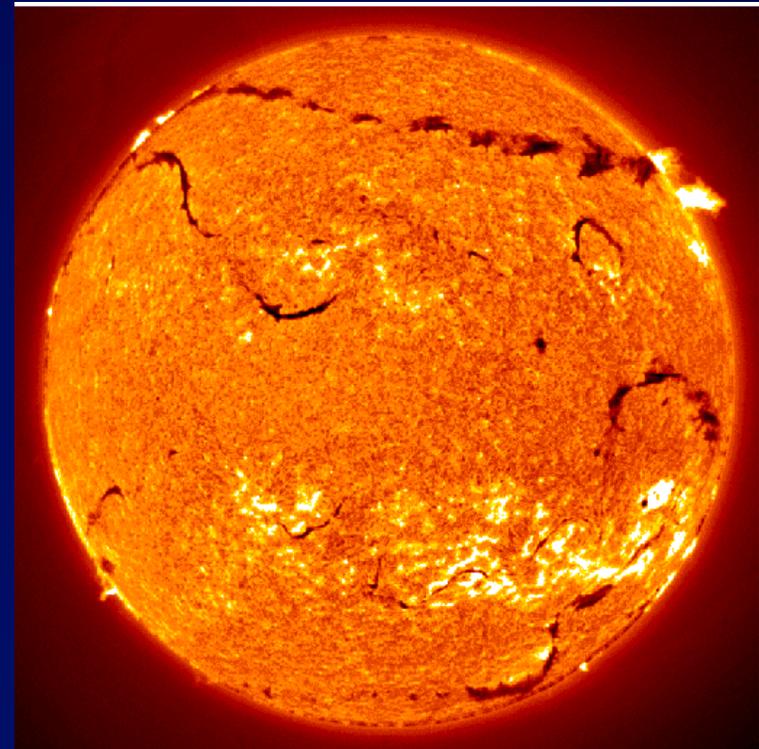
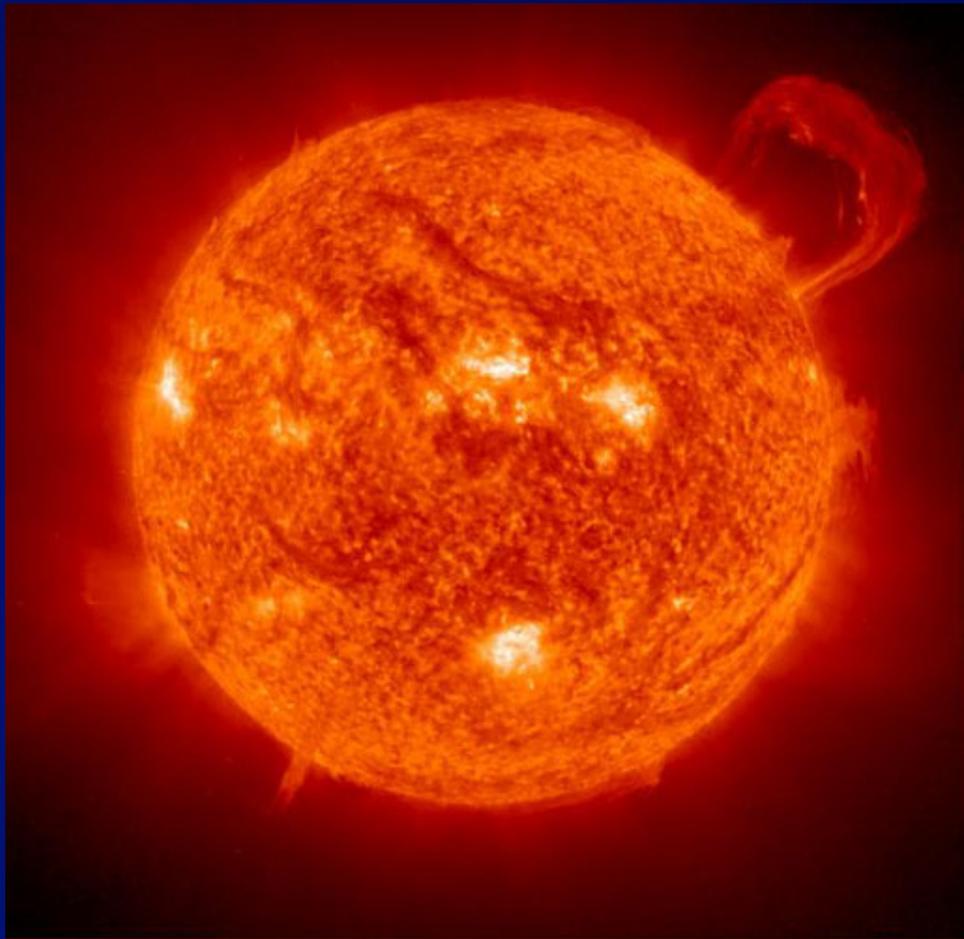
The magnetic nature of sunspots

Hale provided the first proof that sunspots are the seats of strong magnetic fields

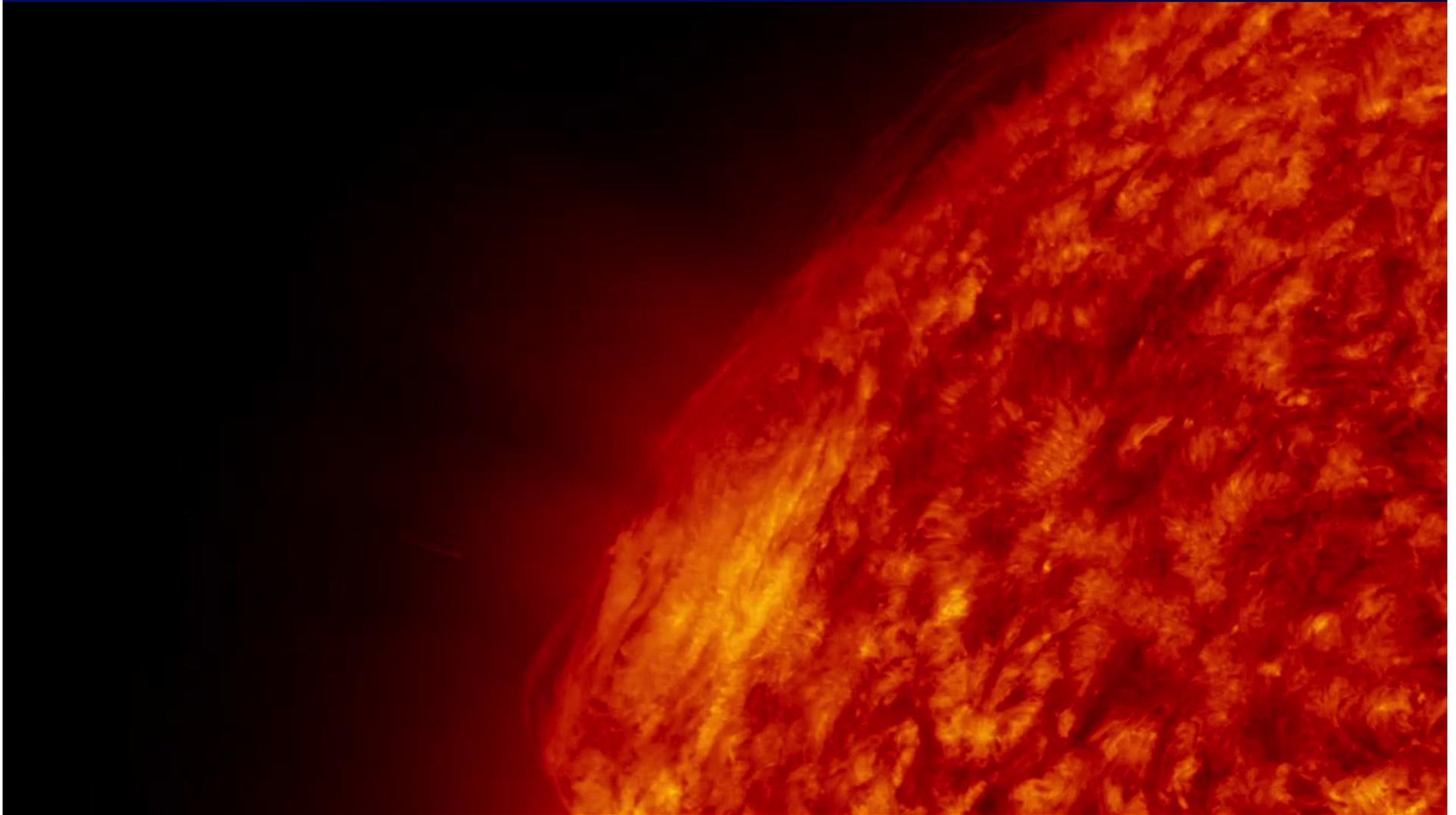


Prominences

Prominences & Filaments: Long-lasting (hours or days) condensations of gases held above the surface by erupting sections of magnetic field

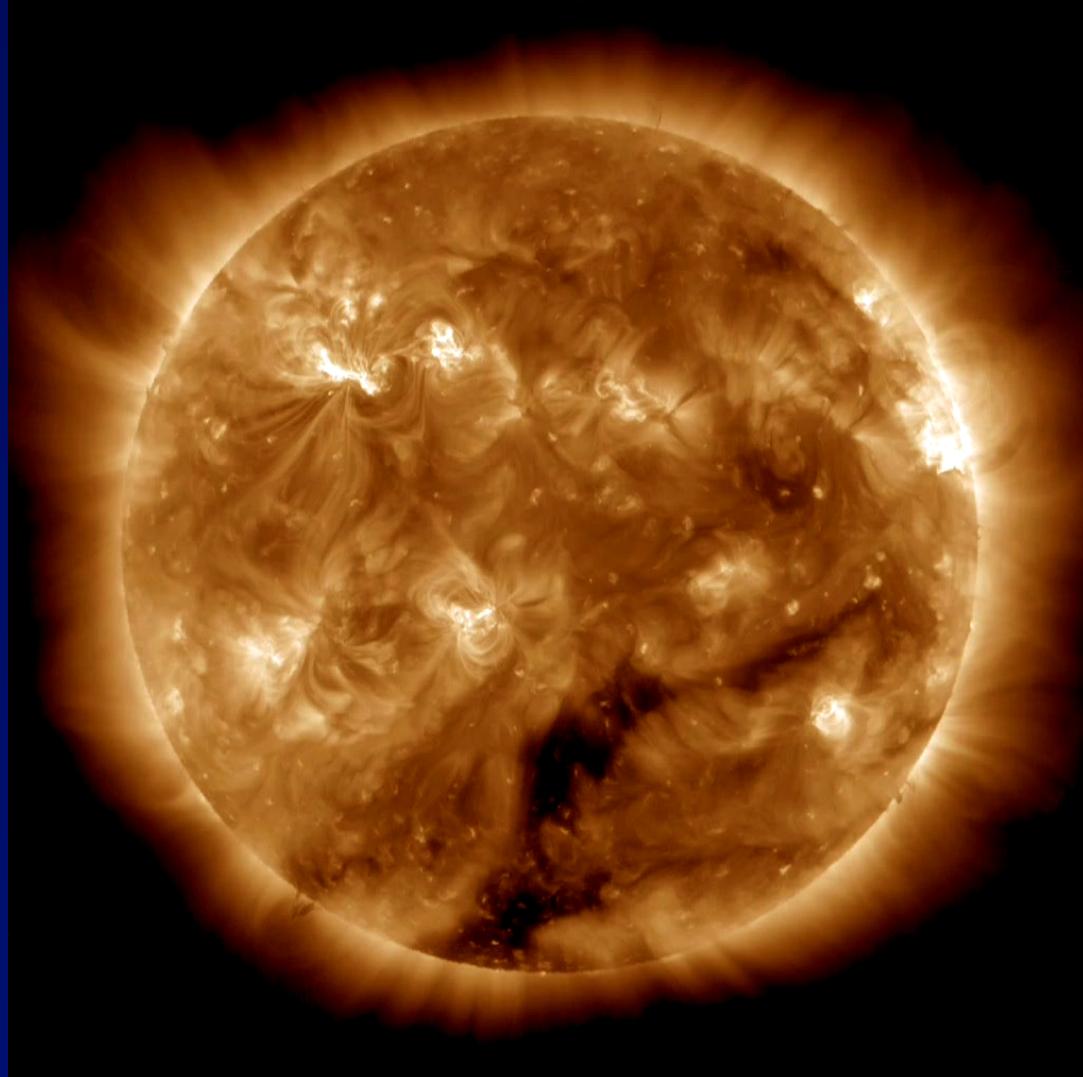


Prominences (2)



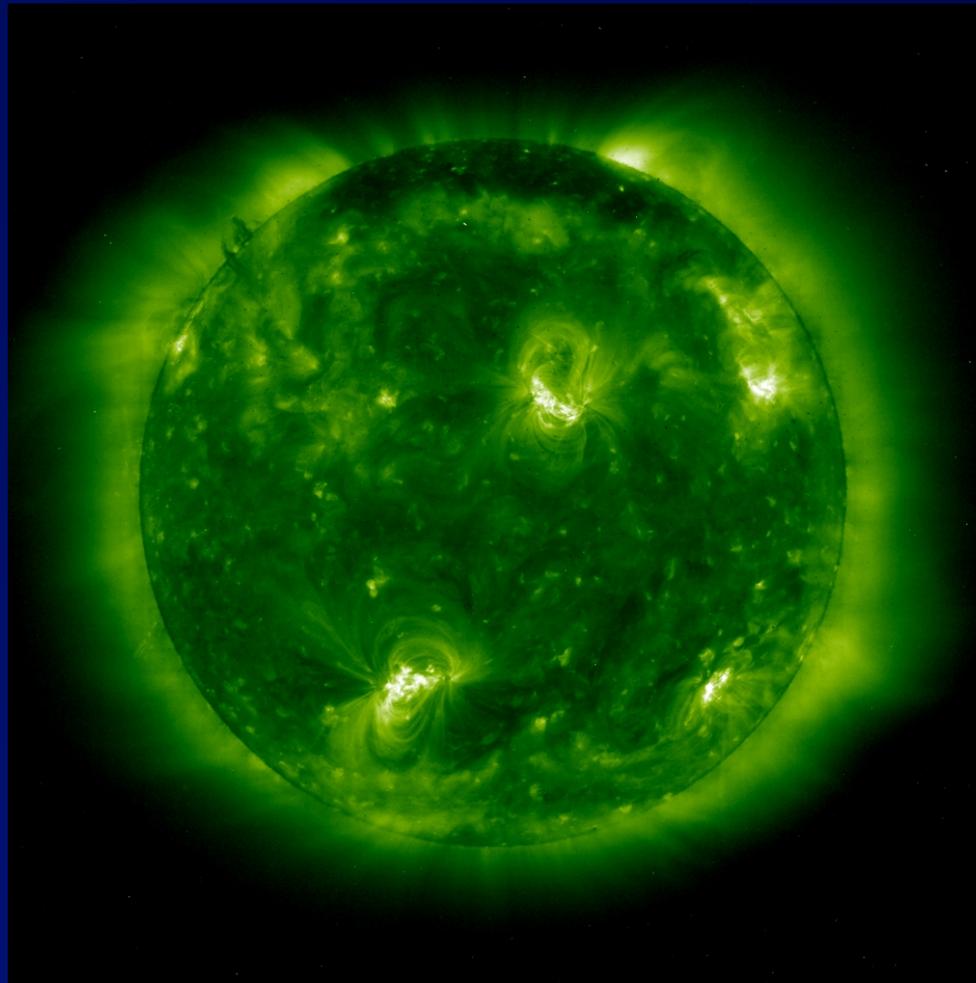
Flares

Flares: short duration (minutes to hours) bursts of hot material out of surface, very bright at all wavelengths



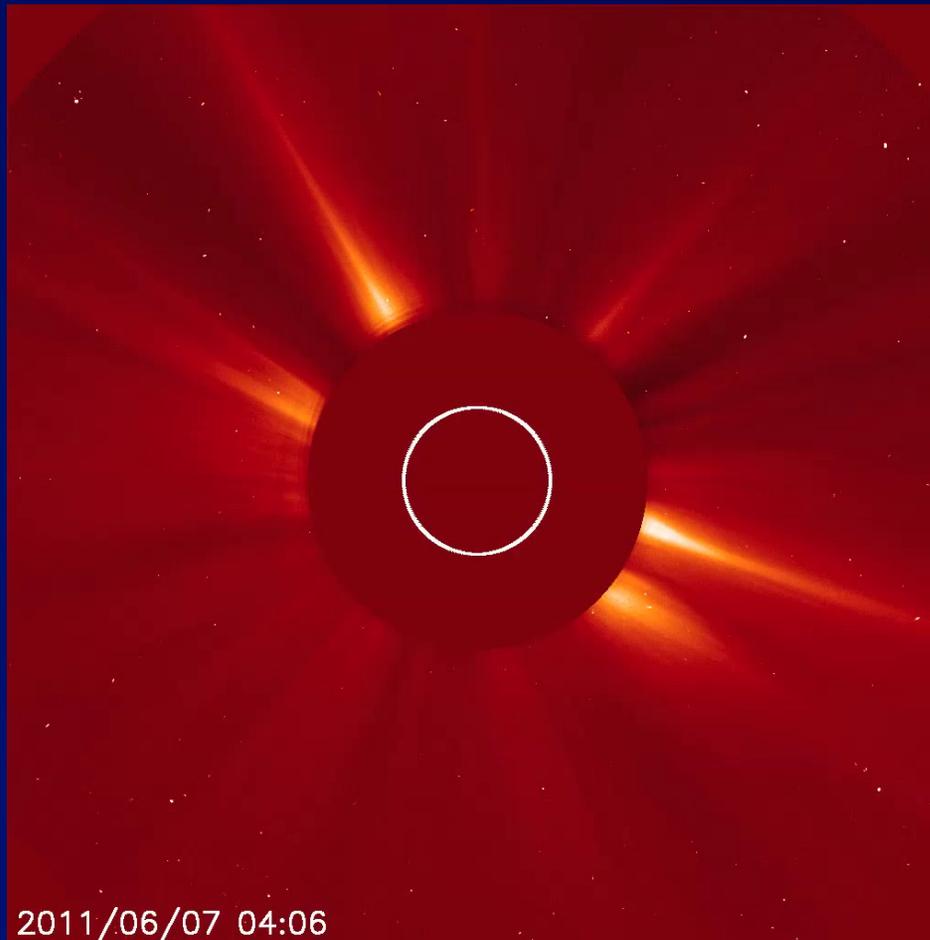
Coronal Holes

Coronal Holes: areas of “open” magnetic field allowing plasma to stream out into solar wind



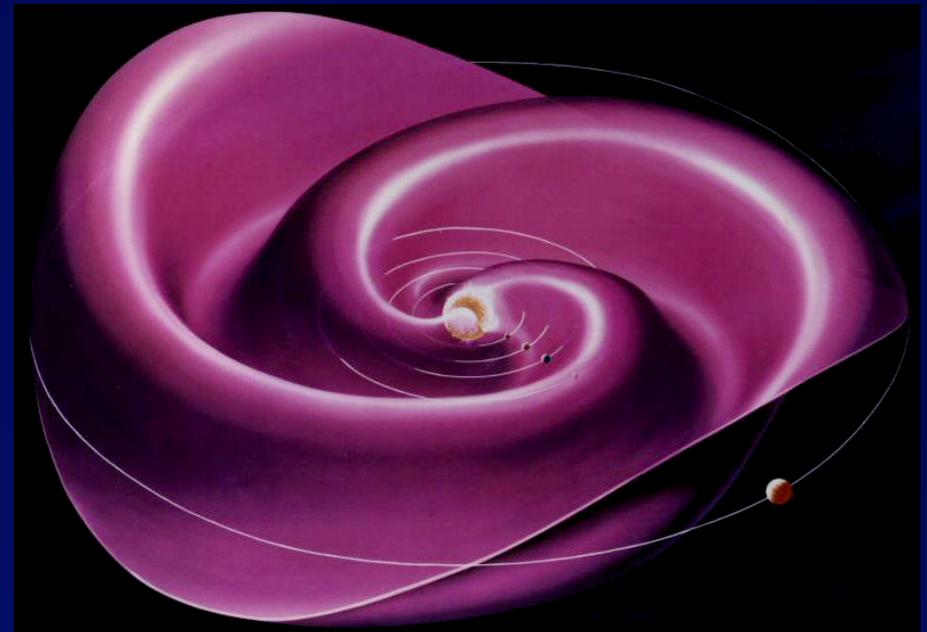
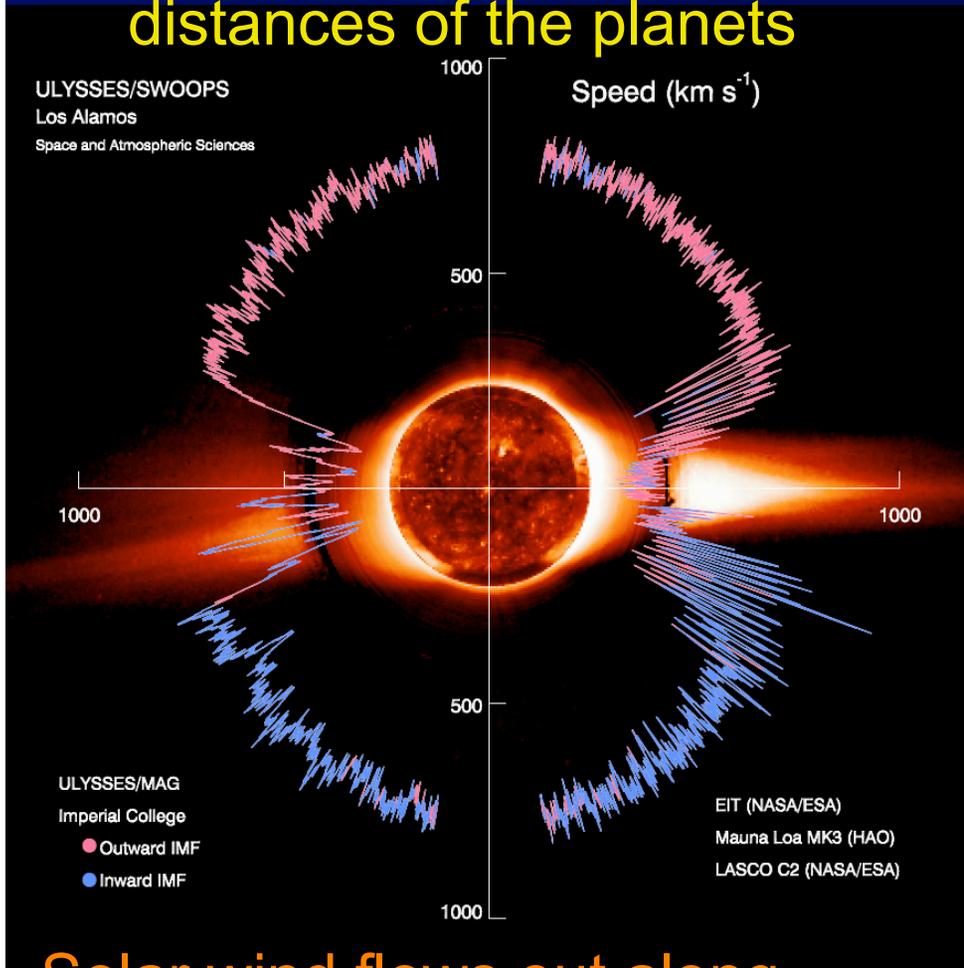
Coronal Mass Ejections

CMEs: large “blobs” of plasma (hot ionized gases enclosed in bubbles of magnetic field) that blow off the Sun and travel out through the solar system



Solar Wind and IMF

Solar Wind: Charged particles streaming out from Sun
Interplanetary Magnetic Field (IMF): Solar magnetic field at distances of the planets



IMF is twisted into “ballerina skirt” shape by solar rotation.

Solar wind flows out along “open” magnetic field lines.

Photon Output of the Sun

