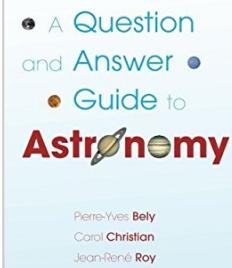


A Question and Answer Guide to Astronomy



By Pierre-Yves Bely, Carol Christian, Jean-René Roy

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Are we alone in the Universe? Was there anything before the Big Bang? Are there other universes? What are sunspots? What is a shooting star? Was there ever life on Mars? This book answers the fascinating questions that we have been asking ourselves for hundreds of years. Using non-technical language, the authors summarize current astronomical knowledge, taking care to include the important underlying scientific principles. Plentiful color illustrations, graphs and photographs lend further weight to their simple yet meticulously written explanations. An extensive bibliography allows you to pursue or recap on the subjects that rouse your particular interest. Dip in to discover and learn fascinating facts about our Solar System and the Universe beyond!

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Editorial Review

Review

"Across 263 pages (not counting the reference, bibliography, and index sections), the authors tackle an amazing range of questions, each explanation generally no more than a page and most illustrated with at least one four-color image, chart, or graph to enhance understanding.

Regardless of how advanced you consider yourself in astronomy or science in general, I don't doubt you will find this trio's collaborative effort intriguing and highly thought provoking - and that you'll probably need to reread one or more entries at least twice to digest the full scope of the information presented. Because each answer also offers a reference to a related entry when necessary, it's easy to skip and skim among questions, hitting those you find most interesting or intriguing before working through the rest of the book. I think this work should reside on every astronomy enthusiast's bookshelf; it will certainly sit on mine." - Chris Raymond, *Astronomy* magazine

"Using just enough relevant pictures, diagrams, and charts, the authors provide lucid answers to the big questions that the study of astronomy tends to generate. ... Each question is one that is likely to arise in the mind of a student. All of the answers are informative and well constructed, are as thorough as one could expect given the space limitations, give proper credit to sources used, and allow for further study by an interested reader. Best of all, this is a very enjoyable read for anyone with even a passing interest in astronomy." - NSTA

"Normally, I would pass quickly by a book that purports to answer 250 questions about astronomy in 263 pages. Instead of glib superficial answers at an elementary level, however, these authors bring their expertise (astrophysics, engineering, and public outreach) to bear on giving clear, concise answers that reflect the best understanding of subjects as diverse as the history of astronomy, cosmology, and the potential for life in environments beyond the Earth. ... It is likely that even professional astronomers will discover some interesting new facts. For example, the section on the invention of the telescope opens with the information that the oldest known lens was found in the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud and that Nero used a monocle to watch gladiator fights. ... This book would be extremely useful for teachers who are looking for quick, clear, and authoritative answers for pre-college students, for professors teaching introductory college astronomy and who need analogies and other ways to explain complex topics such as dark energy and even string theory, and for parents who may be challenged by their children's curiosity about the night sky and all things astronomical." - *Astronomy Education Review*

"This delightful little volume is written as though the authors loved their subject too much to write it as a textbook. While it's aimed at students and those wishing for a well-rounded coverage, it's full of lovely quirky extras, such as that sunspots shine about as bright as the full Moon! Rather than the dry "What is a star?", it starts with "Why do stars shine?" Other topics include a great deal on the planets, the Earth, the Universe, practical astronomy, history, and awkward questions such as astronomy in the Bible, UFOs, and aliens. It's translated from French; while the explanations would be clear and sympathetic in any language, some endearing idiosyncrasies creep in: "Imagine a night sky with no stars, blank, black - with at most a small cloudy spot or two, all that can be seen of our closest neighbour galaxies. Sad, no?" (Though once or twice I did think the translator had a bit too tight a deadline!) This may also be why traditional questions do not always get the standard style of answer: the reason why the Moon looks larger nearer the horizon, for example, suddenly made sense to me after reading this book when it never had before. There are plenty of

footnotes, tables, diagrams, and beautiful photographs. The authors have prepared for different levels of knowledge in their audience, though they seem to assume familiarity and ease with equations. But it's a very human book. It has some inside stories, such as exactly what Fred Hoyle said when he coined the term 'big bang', and discusses how we can comprehend 'astronomical' (i.e. outrageously huge) numbers. I would recommend this book whether you know a lot or a little: it is full of memorable snippets, clear and satisfying reasoning, and enough facts to keep you entertained for a very long time." - Alice Sheppard, Astronomy Now

"The fact that the authors are, respectively, an engineer specialising in telescope design, an astrophysicist, and a senior scientist at the Gemini Observatory, ensures that the underlying principles of astronomy are solidly covered, while the contents of the cosmos and our methods of exploring it are not neglected. Can enthusiasts, perhaps new to astronomy, resist a guide that tells them how to go about finding their own meteorite collection; explains string theory for the uninformed; discusses light pollution and its depredations; and tells them what to do if they discover something 'new' in the sky above? An excellent bibliography and website list complete a very interesting book that ought to have a place on the shelves of astronomers, whatever their level of acquaintance with the noble science." Bob Mizon, J. Br. Astron. Assoc.

"...Bely, Christian and Roy have provided a kind of 'cheat's guide', a 'bluff your way into being an expert' book on every aspect of astronomy and astrophysics, in the form of questions and answers which, although chosen by the authors, are very typical...Overall, I found the book thoroughly worthwhile - I learned a lot, was reminded of much and never felt patronised, although it covered some very basic material. Everything is backed up with references for those wanting to take things further, and the authors do a good job of making clear the limits of knowledge - no-one will leave the book with the impression that cosmology is a closed subject, but they will be certain about many of the wonders of the Earth and everything around it." - Ken Zetie, Contemporary Physics, May 2011

About the Author

Pierre-Yves Bely is an engineer specializing in the design and construction of large optical telescopes. He was Chief Engineer for the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope, has worked on the Hubble Space Telescope and the design of its successor.

Carol Christian is an astrophysicist and Deputy of the Community Missions Office at the Space Telescope Science Institute. In addition to technical and outreach support of NASA missions, she is a collaborator on the Google Sky and World Wide Telescope projects for exploration of the sky on the internet.

Jean-René Roy is an astrophysicist specializing in the evolution of galaxies and the formation of massive stars. He is Deputy Director of the Gemini Observatory, which hosts two of the largest telescopes in the world, one in Hawaii and the other in Chile.

Users Review

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Deanna Ratliff:

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Thomas Carroll:

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