

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION: THE DARK MATTER PROBLEM</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. SOME BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Mass, Weight, and Energy	6
1.2 Distances in the Universe	12
1.3 Measuring Speed Using Redshift	16
1.4 Dark Energy and the Expansion of the Universe	20
<b>2. EVIDENCE FOR DARK MATTER FROM ASTRONOMY</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1 Observations of the Coma Cluster	30
2.2 Orbits of Stars in Galaxies	32
2.3 Numerical Simulations of Galaxy Formation	38
2.4 Gravitational Lensing	40
2.5 1E 0657-56 and the Bullet Cluster	46
2.6 Light from the Big Bang	51
<b>3. NORMAL MATTER: THE STANDARD MODEL</b>	<b>63</b>
3.1 Particles and Interactions	63
3.2 The Higgs Boson	68
3.3 Testing the Standard Model	71

<b>4. WHAT DARK MATTER IS NOT</b>	<b>75</b>
4.1 Making Visible Matter: The Big Bang	76
4.2 Neutrinos as Dark Matter	86
4.3 Black Holes, White Dwarfs, Failed Stars, and Planets	88
4.3.1 Baryonic Compact Objects	88
4.3.2 Primordial Black Holes	92
4.4 Modified Newtonian Dynamics	96
<b>5. SEARCHING FOR WIMPS ON EARTH</b>	<b>98</b>
5.1 Dark Matter in Galaxies	99
5.2 Detecting WIMP Dark Matter from Elastic Scattering	101
5.3 Measuring Two Kinds of Energy	109
5.4 Detecting the Earth's Motion through the Dark Matter Halo	116
<b>6. SEARCHING FOR DARK MATTER IN SPACE</b>	<b>122</b>
6.1 WIMP Annihilation in the Galaxy	122
6.2 Detecting Cosmic Rays	127
<b>7. SEARCHING FOR AXIONS</b>	<b>135</b>
7.1 Why Do We Need Axions?	135
7.2 The Axion Dark Matter Experiment	137
7.3 The CERN Axion Solar Telescope (CAST)	141
<b>8. EPILOGUE</b>	<b>146</b>
8.1 Looking Forward: Current and Upcoming Dark Matter Experiments	146
8.2 Outlook	149
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>SUGGESTED READINGS</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>169</b>

## INTRODUCTION: THE DARK MATTER PROBLEM

Suppose you became aware that there were specters, invisible beings, living in your house. You cannot see, hear, or feel them, but you know they are there, because they move things around your home, open and close doors, and change the room temperature. You begin to notice patterns for these changes, as if they are governed by rules.

After a time, knowing their patterns, you begin to learn the rules. You learn how to predict what changes they will make, and when they will make them. As more time passes, you come to suspect that there are many specters—maybe ten for each person in your house. The specters have always dominated your environment, and you and your family have always responded to them without knowing it.

Your curiosity about the specters grows, and you try to learn more about them—what are they made of? Where did they come from? What do they want? Still, you never sense them directly, but only learn about them through the changes they make in your (their?) home. The specters shape your environment, but you do not shape theirs. They are completely unresponsive to anything you do to communicate with or learn about them. You imagine that the specters have always been there. They are not intruders, but part of the natural order of things.

Most of us would find such a circumstance very strange, perhaps troubling, and certainly very frustrating. How could we have coexisted with so many specters for so long without knowing it? Why is it so difficult to learn about them? Where did they come from?

Over the twentieth century, **astronomers**<sup>1</sup> gradually became aware of “specters” in our universe in the form of a new substance first called “missing mass” and later “**dark matter**.” This book uses the term dark matter. Dark matter created the shape and structure of galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and the universe itself.

The goal of this book is to make sense of the specters that represent dark matter: to explain how astronomers came to know about it; how theoreticians uncovered how dark matter shaped the largest structures in our universe through gravity; and how physicists and astronomers are navigating the complex, frustrating hunt to understand more about dark matter.

I will use the terms **visible matter** or **normal or luminous matter** to refer to **matter** that forms stars and generates the light that we observe through telescopes. Dark matter’s “invisibility” means that it does not form stars or generate light (hence the term “dark” matter). More broadly, “dark” implies that dark matter does not significantly interact with visible or normal matter in any way *other* than through gravity.

Over the past 85 years, **particle physicists**, astronomers, and **astrophysicists** have shown through the process of elimination that no known substance can account for the

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1. The glossary at the end of the book provides brief explanations of words in bold.

effects of dark matter. That includes planets, extra gas in the universe, and anything else that is made of particles that we know about. This also includes the black holes made from the collapse of stars at the end of their lives. However, there is the idea that as-yet unobserved **primordial black holes (PBHs)** that formed in the early universe from matter fluctuations in space-time could explain dark matter.

In the 1930s, a few astronomers began to understand that the amount of visible matter in clusters of galaxies could not explain the motion of the galaxies in their cluster. The total mass of the newly discovered invisible matter appeared to be tens or hundreds of times the visible mass of the stars. In the 1970s, measurements of how stars move inside galaxies led to the idea that some unseen gravitating matter causes the visible stars to orbit around the center of their galaxy faster than predicted from just the mass of the stars alone. To explain this concept, and set the stage for the rest of the book, Chapter 1 provides some physics background. Chapter 2 then lays out the evidence for dark matter from astronomical observations.

In Chapter 3, we turn to what we do know. Four **forces** describe almost all the dynamics of matter. The weak force causes radioactive decays, the strong force binds **quarks** into protons and neutrons and binds protons and neutrons into atomic nuclei, the electromagnetic force determines the structure of matter, and all matter and energy feel the force of gravity. The weak, strong, and electromagnetic forces are all variants of quantum field theory and collectively make up the **Standard Model** of particle physics. The three Standard Model forces act on quarks and leptons that make up normal matter.

The Standard Model explains almost all the observed interactions between particles made since Henri Becquerel first observed radioactive decay in 1896. Albert Einstein and his successors left us with an excellent classical theory of gravity, but theorists have been unable to find a quantum theory of gravity, leaving us with a patchwork of theories: the quantum mechanical Standard Model for quarks and leptons, and classical gravity that acts on all matter. Dark matter does not fit anywhere in our patchwork: None of the known particles from the Standard Model have the properties of dark matter; and classical gravity does not predict particles, as gravity acts on all matter.

Chapter 4 follows the experiments that led to the conclusion that dark matter does not fit into our current view of particle physics, leaving the problem of finding out what dark matter is.

Over the past 30 years, many ideas have emerged to explain the effects of dark matter. This book focuses mostly on two hypothesized new particles, called **Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMPs)** and **axions**, both of which could be dark matter particles. Chapters 5 and 6 explain some of the experiments searching for WIMPs on Earth and in space. Chapter 7 describes the idea behind axions, how axions could be dark matter, and how physicists search for axions.

This book does not end in Chapter 8 with a grand revelation of the properties of dark matter—these still elude my experimental colleagues and me. However, I hope that you will gain a deeper understanding of the dark matter problem and what a triumph it will be when we do learn something new about dark matter.

## INDEX

- $E = mc^2$ , 11, 78  
 $Z^0$  bosons, 124  
1E 0657-56, 46–49, 51, 74, 96
- acceleration, gravitational, 6,  
    8, 9, 11  
    Moon, 11  
Advanced Thin Ionization  
    Calorimeter (ATIC), 131  
alpha decays, 86, 102  
Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer  
    (AMS), 132  
alpha rays, 87, *see also* beta rays;  
    gamma rays, 106, 109  
Alpher, Ralph, 76  
AMS-02 experiment, 147  
Andromeda galaxy, 13, 14, 21,  
    33, 34, 95, 147  
    mass of, 38  
    rotation of, 35  
Andromeda Gravitational  
    Amplification Pixel  
    Experiment (AGAPE), 91  
angular momentum  
    dark matter, 99  
annihilation  
    anti-neutrons, 82  
    anti-quarks, 80  
    dark matter, 122–124,  
        126–128, 131–132, 134  
    electron-positron, 81  
    galaxy, 122–127  
    neutrinos, 82  
    neutron–anti-neutrons, 83  
    probability for, 123  
    rate, 123  
anti-hadrons, 81  
anti-matter, 83  
anti-neutrinos, 80, 81, 82, 88  
anti-neutrons, 81, 82  
anti-particles, 81–83  
anti-protons, 81–83  
anti-quarks, 67, *see also* quarks, 80  
    annihilation, 80  
argon, 112  
asteroids, 95  
astronomers, 2, 3, 8, 12, 18, 21,  
    34, 40, 51, 61, 62, 85, 98,  
    99, 146  
astronomical unit (AU), 12  
astrophysicists, 2, 12, 122  
atmospheric neutrinos, 115  
atomic electrons, 36, 109, 110  
atomic hydrogen, 52

- atomic nuclei, 3, 125, 148
- atoms, 63, 64, 105, 112, 115, 126
- Axion Dark Matter Experiment (ADMX), 137–145
- axions, 4, 73, 93, 94, 97, 98, 101, 123, 135–145, 148, 149
  - detection, 135, 137
  - interaction, 135
  - magnetic field, 140
  - mass, 138
  - microwave, 150
  - microwave photons, 140
  - photons and, 135
- Baade, Walter, 36
- Babcock, Horace, 35, 36
- baryonic compact objects, 88–92
- baryonic gas, 99
- baryonic matter, 85, 97, 99, 103
- baryons, 14, 65, 82, 86, 88, 89, 92–94, 99, 100, 101, 116, 121
- Becquerel, Henri, 4, 86
- beta decay
  - neutrons, 69
- beta decays, 86, 87, 102
- beta electrons, 87
- beta rays, 86, 87, 106, 109
- beta spectrum, 87
- Betelgeuse, 144
- BICEP2 experiment, 77
- Big Bang, 28, 76
  - light from, 51–60
  - nucleosynthesis, 84
  - protons in, 77
  - Big Bang theory, 28, 63, 76, 77, 85, 88, 97
- black holes, 3, 46, 75, 76, 88, 92, 99, 133, 134
  - formation, 76
  - neutron star, 76
  - primordial, 92–96
  - supernova and, 76
- blueshift, 18, 19
- Bohr, Niels, 87, 152
- Bohr's conjecture, 87
- BOOMERanG experiment, 60
- bosons, 64, 67, 68, 71–73
  - exchange, 72
  - gauge, 66
  - scalar, 64, 66
- bubbles, 133
- Bullet Cluster, 46, 47, 49, *see also* Coma Cluster, 51
- Carnegie Observatories, 36
- caustics, 101
- Cepheid variable stars, 21
- CERN Axion Solar Telescope (CAST), 141–145
- charged particle magnetic spectrometer, 130
- clusters, 44, 61, 88
  - motion of galaxies in, 32
- clusters of galaxies, 2, 3, 9, 13, 20, 28, 29
- cold dark matter, 61
- Coma Cluster, 30–32, 38, 75
  - mass-to-light ratio for, 30
  - sky map, 31
  - Zwicky's survey, 31



- conservation of energy, 87
- contraction-expansion-
  - contraction
  - cycle, 55, 57
- COSINE-100, 120
- Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE), 51, 58, 60
- cosmic microwave background (CMB), 52, 58, 60, 76, 77, 85
- cosmic rays, 83, 102, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 113, 114, 115, 122, 123, 124, 125, 147
  - detection, 127–134
  - Earth, 127
  - electrons, 126
  - experiments, 128
  - muons, 108
  - particles, 106
  - proton, 114
  - protons, 126
- cosmological constant, 20, 27, 28
- cosmologists, 12, 23, 77
- cosmology, 28
- cosmos, 6, 77, 134
- Coulomb interaction, 54
- Cowan, Clyde, 75
- CP, 136
- Cryogenic Dark Matter Search (CDMS), 110–112, 147
- Cryogenic Rare Event Search with Superconducting Thermometers (CRESST), 111
- cryostat, 108
- Cygnus, 116, 117, 120
- dark baryons, 89
- dark energy, 20–28
  - density, 26
- dark matter, 20, 75, 105
  - angular momentum, 99
  - annihilation, 122–124, 127, 131, 132
  - axions, 98, 141
  - cosmic rays, 134
  - defined, 2
  - density fluctuations, 53
  - detector, 108
  - elastic scattering, 104
  - experiments, 102, 116
  - galactic halo, 123
  - galaxies, 99–101
  - gravitational field, 40
  - gravitational forces, 29
  - halo, 116–121
  - interaction, 113
  - interaction rate with normal matter, 103
  - invisibility, 2
  - neutrinos as, 86–88
  - particles, 103
  - PBH, 94
  - potential well, 54, 55
  - WIMPs, 102
- Dark Matter Radio (DMRadio), 148
- Dark Matter/Large sodium Iodide Bulk for RAre processes (DAMA/LIBRA) experiment, 118, 119, 120
- decoupling, 82
- density fluctuations, 52, 53, 57, 88, 98, 99

- detector
  - cosmic rays, 128
  - nuclear recoil, 115
  - solar axions, 142
  - spaceborne, 126
- deuterium, 53, 84, 88
- deuterons, 84, 115
- differential microwave radiometers (DMRs), 58
- dipole magnet, 142, 143
- Dirac, Paul A. M., 150, 152
- distances in universe, 12–14
  - Andromeda galaxy, 13
  - astronomical unit (AU), 12
  - Earth to Moon, 12
  - Earth to Proxima Centauri, 13
  - Earth to Sun, 12
  - light-year (lt-yr), 12
  - meters, 12
  - scientific notation, 12
  - solar system to galactic superclusters, 15
- Doppler shift of sound, 19
- double beta decays, 106
- dwarf galaxies, 34, 133
- dying star, explosion, 124
- dynamical law, 6
- Earth
  - atmosphere, 115
  - atmosphere, 127
  - axions and, 123
  - cosmic rays, 127
  - magnetic field, 125, 128
  - Moon, distance to, 12
  - motion detection through dark matter halo, 116–121
  - orbit, 13, 99
  - size of, 13
  - Sun orbit, 13, 116
  - WIMPs and, 123
- Eddington, Arthur, 43
- Edelweiss-III, 108
- Einstein, Albert, 4, 5, 11, 18, 23, 27, 43, 77, 150, 152
- Einstein radius, 90, 91
- Einstein's theory of general relativity, 23, 28, 77
- Einstein's theory of gravity, 43, 72, 74, 152
- electric field, 120, 138
- electromagnetic calorimeter (ECAL), 130
- electromagnetic decay, 69
- electromagnetic energy, 68
- electromagnetic forces, 3, 10, 29, 49, 72, 150
- electromagnetic waves, 16, 44
- electron-positron annihilation, 81, 83
- electron-positron flux, 132
- electronic forces, 68
- electrons, 53, 65, 68, 80, 81, 86, 124
- electroweak unification, 150
- Ellis, Charles, 87
- energy, 5–12
- energy density, 23
- energy threshold, 118
- Expérience pour la Recherche d'Objets Sombres (EROS), 91, 92

- failed stars, 32, 86, 88–89
- Fast Fourier Transform (FFT), 140
- Fermi, Enrico, 124, 150
- Fermi Bubbles, 133–134
- Fermi Gamma-Ray Space Telescope (Fermi), 132, 133
- Fermi National Laboratory, 72
- Fermi spacecraft, 134
- fermions, 64, 67, 68, 71–73
- fine-tuning problem, 72, 73
- fission reactor, 75
- forces, 3
  - acting on body, 7
  - bodies produces, 5
  - carriers, 65
  - defined, 6
  - distance between the bodies and, 7
  - electromagnetic, 3, 10, 29, 65, 72
  - gravitational, 3, 5, 8, 15, 29
  - motion of objects, 5
  - size of, 7
  - strong, 3, 29, 65, 72
  - tidal, 10
  - weak, 3, 29, 65, 72
- Ford, Kent, 36, 38, 39
- Friedmann, Alexander, 77
- galactic halo, 123
- galactic magnetic field, 125
- galactic structure, 14
- galactic superclusters, 15
- galaxies, 2, 3, 21
  - 1E 0657-56, 46, 47–49
  - Bullet Cluster, 46, 51
  - dark matter in, 99–101
  - formation, 38, 100
  - lensing, 45
  - mass of, 34
  - motion of, 18, 30, 41
  - motion of stars, 33
  - New General Catalog (NGC), 39
  - orbit of stars in, 32–38
  - recession measurement, 22
  - universality of rotation curves, 39
- galaxy clusters, 13, 27, 61
- Galilei, Galileo, 5
- gamma rays, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 115, 127, 133, 134
  - map of galaxy, 133
  - photons, 110, 112, 132
- Gamow, George, 76
- gas, 78
  - baryonic, 99
  - thermal energy, 79
- gauge bosons, 64, 66
- generation of particles, 64
- germanium, 104, 107, 109
  - detector, 105
  - double beta decays, 111
  - experiments, 109, 110
- gluons, 3, 65, 69, 78, 79
- gravitational field, 40
- gravitational forces, 3, 5, 8, 15, 29
- gravitational lensing, 40–46, 50, 89, 147, 149
- gravitational waves, 150
- gravitational well, 54
- gravity, 3, 4, 5, 67, 93
  - bending of space and time, 72

- gravity (*cont.*)  
  dark matter and, 99  
  distant bodies, between, 6  
  effects, 5  
  light ray deflection, 42  
Green Bank Observatory, 36
- hadrons, 64, 65, 67, 81  
Hahn, Otto, 87  
Hawking, Stephen, 92, 95  
helium, 53, 127  
Herman, Robert, 76  
Higgs boson, 64, 66–72, 147,  
  150  
  particles, 66, 69, 71  
High Energy Anti-matter  
  Telescope (HEAT), 131  
high-energy electrons, 131  
high-energy particles, 83  
high-energy positrons, 131  
HII regions, 36  
Hitchcock, Alfred, 152  
Hubble, Edwin, 19, 21, 22  
Hubble Constant, 22  
Hubble flow, 27  
Hubble Space Telescope (HST),  
  16  
Hubble's law, 22, 28  
hydrogen, 54, 56, 57, 76  
hydrogen atoms, 51, 65, 125  
hydrogen gas, 34  
  velocity of, 36
- inertia, 6  
inflationary theory, 77, 78  
inflations, 52  
inflaton, 52
- International Axion Observatory  
  (IAXO), 144, 148  
intracluster gas, 47, 49  
invisible matter, 3  
ionization energy loss, 126  
isotopes, 67
- Kaptyn's star, 30, 32  
Kepler, Johannes, 5  
kinematic law, 6  
kinetic energy, 15, 79, 87  
  dark matter, 118  
  nucleus, 102
- Lambda-CDM model, 61  
Large Area Telescope  
  (Fermi/LAT), 132  
Large Hadron Collider (LHC),  
  147  
Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC),  
  13, 90, 147  
Laser Interferometer  
  Gravitational-Wave  
  Observatory (LIGO),  
  150  
LeMaitre, Georges, 77  
lensing effect, 43  
leptons, 3, 4, 64, 65, 66, 68,  
  78–80, 124  
Lick Observatory, 36  
light detectors, 112  
light waves, 17, 25  
light-year (lt-yr), 12  
liquid helium, 138, 139  
liquid helium coolant, 129  
Lowell Observatory, 18  
LZ, 147

- M31, *see* Andromeda galaxy  
MacGuffins, 152  
MACHO experiment, 89, 91, 92  
magnet, 129  
magnetic field, 125, 126, 138  
Majorana mass, 151  
Majorana neutrinos, 151  
mass, 5–12  
    axions, 137, 138  
    measurement, 6  
    protons, 137, 139, 141, 144  
mass-energy, 12  
mass-to-light ratios, 30  
massive compact halo object  
    (MACHOs), 89  
matter, 2  
matter density, 23  
matter-energy density, 25  
MAXIMA balloon experiment,  
    61  
Mayall, Nicholas, 36  
Meitner, Lise, 87  
Mercury, 95  
microlensing, 46  
microwave axions, 150  
microwave photon, 100  
Milgrom, Mordechai, 96  
Milky Way galaxy, 13, 21, 30, 89,  
    99–101  
    lensing transiting objects, 90  
missing mass, *see* dark matter  
modified Newtonian dynamics  
    (MOND), 46, 47, 74, 96  
motion of objects, 5  
Mount Palomar Observatory, 30  
Mount Wilson Observatory, 36  
muon veto, 108  
muons, 64, 65, 66, 71, 114, 124  
    spin frequency, 71  
nebula, 21  
neon, 112  
Neptune, 13  
neutral supersymmetric particles,  
    103  
neutrinoless double beta decay,  
    151  
neutrinos, 64, 65, 66, 75, 78–81,  
    86–88, 103, 111, 114–116,  
    124  
    annihilation, 82  
    atmospheric, 115  
    dark matter, 86–88  
    electron, 64, 87  
    electron-positron annihilation  
        to, 81  
    muon, 64, 88  
    tau, 64, 88  
neutron stars, 75, 76, 89  
neutrons, 3, 53, 65, 67, 81–83,  
    86, 87, 115, 136  
    absorber, 108, 113  
    beta decay, 69  
    electric dipole moment, 136  
New General Catalog (NGC), 39  
Newton, Isaac, 5  
Newton's dynamic law of  
    gravitation, 7–8  
Newton's law of gravitation, 5  
    on distant object, 6  
Newton's laws of motion, 5, 6  
    first law, 6  
    second law, 6, 8, 96  
    third law, 7

- noble gases, 112
- normal matter, 2
- nuclear beta decay, 75
- nuclear physicist, 86
- nuclear recoil experiments, 88, 144, 147
- nucleus, 65
  - recoiling, 110
- Optical Gravitational Lensing
  - Experiment (OGLE), 91, 92
- orbital velocity, 34, 37, 38
- orbits of stars in galaxies, 32–38
- Ostriker, Jerimiah, 41
- particle annihilation, 79
- particle detectors, 105
- particle physicist, 2
- particle-anti-particle pairs, 83
- particles decoupling, 82
- Pauli, Wolfgang, 87
- Payload for Anti-matter Matter
  - Exploration and Light-nuclei Astrophysics (PAMELA), 131, 132
- PBH, *see* primordial black holes (PBH)
- Peebles, James, 41
- phase transition, 52, 53
- phonons, 109, 111
- photo detectors, 113
- photons, 16, 25, 40, 54, 59, 65, 68, 78–81, 109, 110, 114, 126, 132
  - electron-positron annihilation, 81
  - fusion, 80
  - massless, 80
  - trapping, 141
- physicists, 75, 87
- pion, 69, 100
- Planck, 59, 60
- planetary orbit, 10
- planets, 88, 89
- Pluto, orbit, 13
- position, 8
- position-measuring detectors, 130
- positrons, 53, 80, 81, 83, 126
- primordial black holes (PBH), 3, 92–96, 148, 150
- primordial universe, 92
- Principia* (Newton), 6, 7
- protons, 3, 53, 65, 67, 81–83, 86, 100, 114, 127
  - cosmic rays, 114
- Proxima Centauri, 13
- pulsars, 122, 133
- quantum chromodynamics (QCD), 135, 136
- quantum field theory, 3
- quantum mechanical density
  - fluctuations, 88, 92, 99
- quantum mechanical Standard Model for quarks and leptons, 4
- quantum mechanics, 52, 87, 93
- quarks, 3, 4, 64–68, 78–81, *see also* anti-quarks, 124
- quasar, 44, 45

- radio frequencies, 76
- radioactive contamination, 106
- radioactive decay, 4, 106
- radioactivity, 107
- radon gas, 107
- recoil particle, 101, 102
- redshift, 6, 18, 19, 76
  - measuring speed using, 16–20
  - orbital velocity, 34
  - radio waves, 34
  - velocities of galaxies, 22
- Reines, Frederick, 75
- relativistic quantum field theory, 150
- ring imaging Cerenkov detector (RICH), 130
- Roberts, Mort, 36, 38
- Robertson, Howard, 77
- Rubin, Vera, 36, 38, 39
- Rutherford, Ernest, 87
  
- scalar boson, 64, 66
- scattering, 54
- scattering off charged particles, 82
- Schmidt-Cassegrain refracting telescope, 30
- scientific notion, 12
- scintillation light, 112
- shock waves, 124
- single-sided bound, 151
- Slipher, Vesto, 18, 21, 33
- Sloan Digital Sky Survey, 44
- Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC), 13
- solar axion detector, 142
- solar system, 9, 116
  
- solid-state detectors, 112
- spaceborne experiments, 128
- special relativity, 11
- spiral galaxy, 13
- spiral nebula, 33
- spring scale, 10, 11
- standard candles, 21
- Standard Model of particle physics, 3, 4, 63, 64, 75, 79, 98
- axions, 137
- bosons, 67
- electrons, 66
- fermions, 67
- force carriers, 64–66
- forces, 65
- gluons, 78
- Higgs boson, 66–71
- leptons, 78
- neutrinos, 66, 78
- particles and interactions, 63–68
- photons, 78
- quarks, 66, 78
- testing, 71–74
- Standard Model of particles physics, 123
- stars
  - failed, 88, 89
  - light-emitting, 32, 33
  - motion in galaxy, 33
  - neutron, 75, 76, 89
  - red giant, 137
  - visible, 3
- stellar nucleosynthesis, 84
- strong forces, 3, 29, 72

- Subaru telescope, 95
- Sun, 13
- super clusters, 13
- superclusters, 13–15, 88
- superconducting thermometers, 112
- supernova, 76
- supernova explosions, 122, 124
- Supernovas, 133
- supersymmetric particles, 97
- Supersymmetry (SUSY), 73
- SUSY, *see* Supersymmetry (SUSY)
  
- tau, 64, 65, 124
- theory of gravity, 4, 7, 27, 72, 94
- Theory of Relativity, 18
  - General, 5, 22
  - Special, 5, 11, 18, 20, 22
- thermal energy, 54
  - gas, 79
- thermal equilibrium, 80–82
- thorium, 107
- tidal force, 10
- time of flight (TOF) system, 130
- tracker, 128
- transient lensing, 95
- transition radiation detector (TRD) system, 130
- Triangulum galaxy, 33, 34, 36
  - rotation curve, 37
- two energy measurements, 109, 110
  
- universal laws of motion, 5
- universe
  - expansion of, 19, 22, 23, 26
  - matter-energy constant, 22
  
- Uppsala General Catalogue of Galaxies (UGC), 39
- uranium, 107
  
- vacuum expectation value (VEV), 69–71
- vector bosons, 64, 68
- velocity, 6, 8, 18
  - dispersion, 31
  - fractional recession, 26
  - hydrogen gas, 36
  - of galaxy, 21
  - orbit, 34
  - rotation of stars, 19
  - stars in galaxies, 36
- virial theorem, 31, 32
- visible matter, 2
  - gravitational forces on, 29
  - motion of galaxies, 3
- Volders, Louise, 36
- Vuilluemier, Jean-Luc, 152
  
- Walker, Arthur, 77
- wavelength of light, 17
- weak forces, 3, 29, 72, 150
- weak lensing, 46, 47
- Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMPs), 4, 73, 93, 101, 102, 103, 104, 121, 144, 147, 148
- annihilation in galaxy, 122–127
- detectors, 107, 112, 115, 118, 119, 137



- weight, 5–12
  - Earth, on, 10
  - force of gravity, 11
  - Moon, on, 11
- white dwarfs, 46, 88
- Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP), 59, 60
- WIMP, *see* Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMPs)
- x-ray photon, 100, 102, 142, 143, 149
- x-ray telescopes, 47, 144
- xenon, 112
- XENON10T, 147
- Zwicky, Fritz, 30–32, 75
  - galaxies of Coma Cluster, survey, 31
  - measurements, 62