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On the Cover

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“The supernova remnant known as Cassiopeia A is the result of an explosion in 1680 of a star that was about twenty-five times as massive as our Sun. When nuclear fuel was exhausted, the core of the star fell in on itself. Some of that matter rebounded to eject the outer parts of the star, and some remained in a neutron star, seen as a blue dot at center, with a density one hundred trillion times that of water. The ejected matter plows into the tenuous interstellar medium at speeds of several thousand kilometers per second, heating it to ten million degrees or more.

“This composite NASA image shows infrared light visualized by the Spitzer Space Telescope as red, visible light visualized by the Hubble Space Telescope as yellow, and X-rays visualized by the Chandra Observatory as blue and green. The oxygen we breathe, the calcium in our bones, and the iron in our blood, among other elements, was made in such explosions prior to the formation of our solar system.”

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