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## On the Cover

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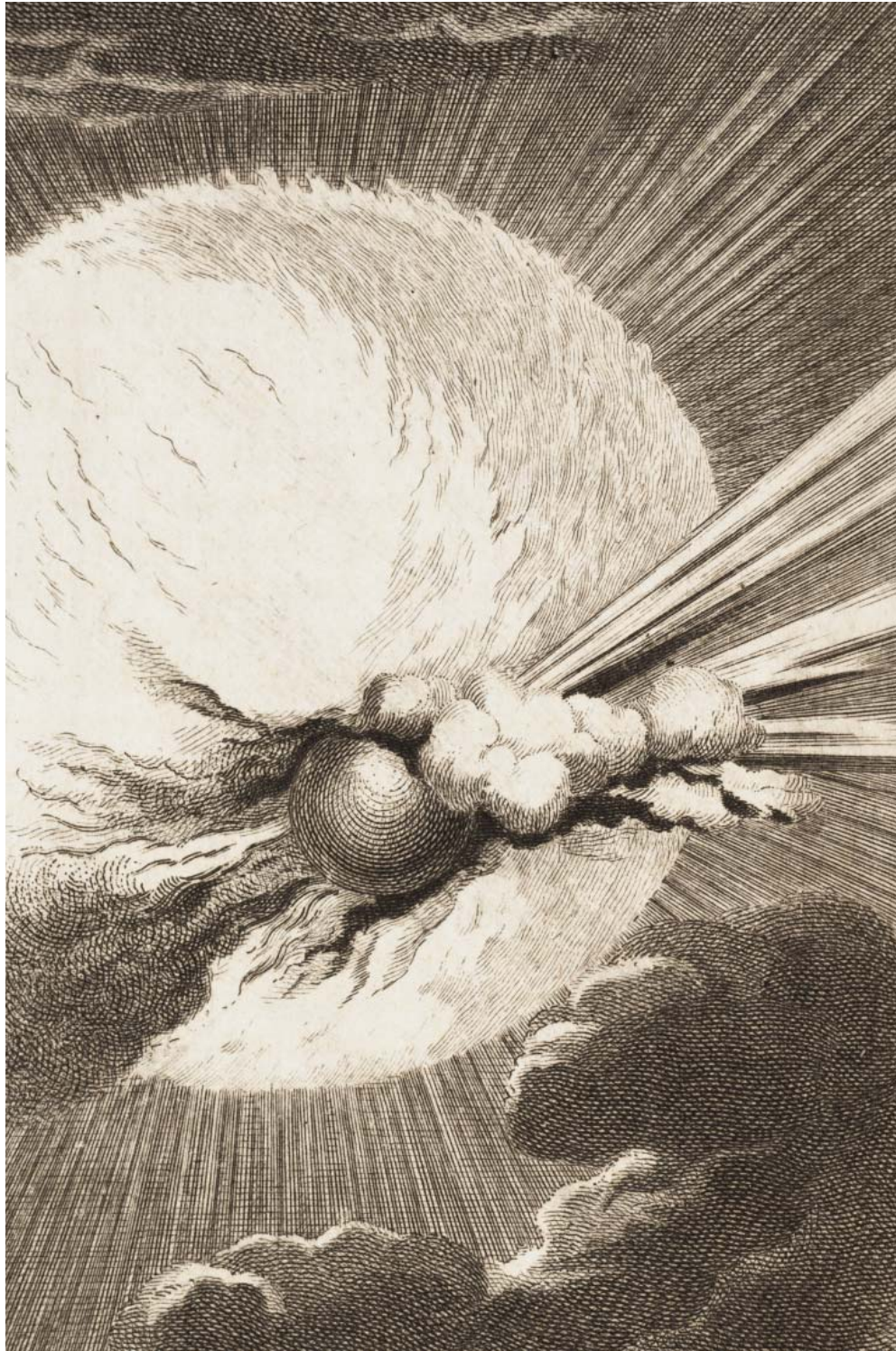
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# SciTech News

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# SciTech News

Ellis Mount, Editor Emeritus



## On the Cover



Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, attempted in 1749 to explain why the solar system consists of planets that all move in the same direction, and in the same plane. Buffon proposed that, eons ago, the sun was struck by a comet which knocked out a number of molten blobs of solar stuff, and these in turn slowly cooled and condensed into planets. Buffon even worked out a timetable, estimating that the cooling process must have taken at least 75,000 years, which far exceed the conventional 6,000 years then assigned to the age of the world. Buffon did not illustrate the cosmic impact in the first edition of his *Histoire naturelle* (1749), but a later edition (published in *Deux-Ponts*, 1785-91) contains this marvelous engraving of the primordial comet smashing into the sun (*photo and caption courtesy of the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology*).

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